GASTON H. HALSBERGHE

THE CULT OF SOL INVICTUS

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ÉTUDES PRÉLIMINAIRES AUX RELIGIONS ORIENTALES DANS L'EMPIRE ROMAIN

PUBLIÉES PAR

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LEIDEN
E. J. BRILL
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Aureus. Gold coin of L. Domitius Aurelianus; the laureate bust of the emperor, wearing a cuirass. (H. Cohen, VI, 194, nº 178)

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WITH A FRONTISPIECE

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INTRODUCTION

It is a remarkable circumstance that publications on the subject of Roman paganism devote little attention to the existence, importance and survival of a Sun cult in Rome during the Empire. These publications share a further negative characteristic—the lack of any systematic attempt at connecting religious, political and social developments in the Roman Empire.

This work represents an attempt to describe the interaction of political and religious life in the 3rd century A.D., a period in which political and social life were dominated by the cult of Deus Sol Invictus.

Roman religious life, a subject that has been studied many times and in many ways, has seldom been considered in relation to the life of the State as such, even though, to the Roman, State and religion were not separable entities. The first modern proponent of this view is Altheim, in his invaluable work, *Römische Religionsgeschichte* III, (no. 107 in the Sammlung Göschen, Berlin 1933; revised edition, II, no. 1052, Berlin 1956), which is concerned mainly with two aspects of his subject. On the one hand, Altheim established the relationship between the religious life of Rome and religious life on the Italian Peninsula as a whole, and on the other, he traced the connection between religion and other aspects of Roman life, including politics.[1] This original approach gives the work its distinction and sets it apart from other work on the subject.

This approach to the history of Roman religious life can confront the student with many unforeseen problems, particularly if his point of contact is the cult of Sol Invictus, the invicible Sun God, to whose existence and influence on Roman political life no special study has previously been devoted. Little importance has ever been accorded this cult of the Sun God, which originated in Syria and was imposed on Rome and the Empire at the beginning of the 3rd

[1] W. Peremans has already called attention to this point of view in *Philologische Studiën* V, 1933-1934, 134-135.

century A.D. by the young emperor Elagabalus. The opinion advanced by P. Habel (*Zur Geschichte des in Rom von den Kaisern Elagalabus und Aurelianus eingeführten Sonnenkultes* in *Commentationes in honorem Studemundi*, Strasburg 1889, 95 *et seq.*) and others is that Sol Invictus is to be identified with Persian Mithras, and that it was the cult of Mithras on which Aurelian based his religious reforms. In fact, as we shall show, the cult which Aurelian restored, re-established and Romanised, was the cult of Sol Invictus.

The essential doctrines of this cult are impossible to describe or define, since the documents we should require for such a study are lacking. However, we feel that we are justified in concluding, from the material at our disposal, that one of the influences that contributed to the cult was that of Neo-Platonism.

The phenomenon of religious syncretism had certainly been in evidence for a long time before it attained its dominant position in the religious life of the 3rd and 4th centuries. The cult of Deus Sol Invictus, influenced as it was by Neo-Platonism, is one of the clearest examples of this phenomenon known to us.

The object of the present work is to show that the cult of the Sun was of greater importance than has hitherto been assumed. However, we have limited ourselves to the cult of Deus Sol Invictus in Rome, rather than attempt a study of sun cults in general. For this reason, a number of considerations, such as the nature and extent of the influence other sun cults might have had on the cult of Deus Sol Invictus, or the possible influence of this cult on others, for instance that of Ianus Matutinus, were felt to be beyond the scope of this book.

In the 3rd century, the Romans were for a number of reasons increasingly attracted to a certain type of monotheism, mainly because of the popularity of the cult of Deus Sol Invictus. This is why L. Frobenius (*Das Zeitalter des Sonnengottes*, Berlin 1904) was able to speak of a monotheism of the Sun. It is our intention to demonstrate the importance of this Sun Cult, and to describe its basic doctrines.

Our chief aim will be to prove that the cult of Deus Sol Invictus exerted an influence on Roman religious life from the 3rd century onwards that was of equal importance to that commonly attributed

to the cult of Mithras. Admittedly, of course, the Persian cult of Mithras and the Syrian cult of Sol Invictus had many features, including their tenets, in common, and owed each other much in the recruitment of adherents.

The Syrian religion of Sol Invictus became known all over the Imperium. Its first period of success was during the reign of Elagabalus (218-222), but it was not until the reign of Aurelian (270-274), who gave the cult its final form and adapted it to the traditional Roman cultural pattern, that it came to full flower. It was thus adopted by Roman nationalists who clung to the idea of "Romanitas" and saw in the cult a vehicle for their conservatism. In this final phase of its development, the cult came to be the most powerful adversary of Christianity, at a time when the influence of its closest rival, Mithraism, was already on the wane.

We wish to take this opportunity of thanking Prof. Dr. M. J. Vermaseren, Mrs. M. E. C. Vermaseren and Miss M. B. de Boer, who took an important part in the realization of this work, and also E. J. Brill, the publishers, who arranged for translation and publication. Special thanks are also due to Prof. Dr. F. J. de Waele, who acted as intermediary.

Antwerp, 1971.

CHAPTER I

THE LITERARY TEXTS

MARCUS TERENTIUS VARRO (116-ca. 26 B.C.)

DE RE RUSTICA (*ed.* G. Goetz, Leipzig 1929)

I,1,5 Neque tamen eos urbanos, quorum imagines ad forum auratae stant, sex mares et feminae totidem, sed illos XII deos, qui maxime agricolarum duces sunt. Primum, qui omnis fructos agri culturae caelo et terra continent, Iovem et Tellurem: itaque, quod ii parentes, magni dicuntur, Iuppiter pater appellatur, Tellus terra mater. Secundo Solem et Lunam, quorum tempora observantur, cum quaedam seruntur et conduntur. Tertio Cererem et Liberum .....

DIONYSIOS OF HALICARNASSUS (first century B.C.)

ANTIQUITATES ROMANAE (*ed.* C. Jacoby, 1885-1925) (rep. I. Lugli, *Fontes* I, 36, n° 161)

II, 50, 3 Ἱερά τε ἱδρύσαντο καὶ βωμοὺς καθιέρωσαν .... Τάτιος δὲ Ἡλίῳ τε καὶ Σελήνῃ καὶ Κρόνῳ καί Ῥέᾳ, πρὸς δὲ τούτοις Ἑστίᾳ, καὶ Ἡφαίστῳ καὶ Ἀρτέμιδι καὶ Ἐνυαλίῳ καὶ ἄλλοις θεοῖς, ὧν χαλεπὸν ἐξειπεῖν Ἕλλάδι γλώττῃ τὰ ὀνόματα ....

PUBLIUS CORNELIUS TACITUS (ca. 55-120 A.D.)

ANNALES (*ed.* E. Koestermann, Leipzig 1960).

XV, 41, 1 Domuum et insularum et templorum, quae amissa sunt, numerum inire haud promptum fuerit; sed vetustissima religione, quod Servius Tullius Lucilae (Lunae), et magna ara fanumque praesenti Herculi Arcus Evander sacraverat, aedesque Statoris Iovis vota Romulo Numaeque regia et delubrum Vestae cum penatibus populi Romai exusta; .....

XV, 74, 1 Tum dona et grates deis decernuntur, propriusque honos Soli, cui est vetus aedes apud Circum, in quo facinus parabatur, qui occulta coniurationis numine retexisset .....

HISTORIAE (*ed.* Bornecque, Paris 1954)

III, 24 Undique clamor, et orientem Solem (ita in Syria mos est) tertiani salutavere.

L. APULEIUS (ca. 125 - the end of the 2nd century A.D.)

METAMORPHOSEON LIBRI XI (*ed.* R. Helm, Leipzig 1955)

II, 22 Iam primum, respondit ille, perpetem noctem eximie vigilandum est exertis et inconivis oculis semper in cadaver intentis nec acies usquam devertenda, immo ne obliquanda quidem, quippe cum deterrimae versipelles in quodvis animal ore converso latenter adrepant, ut ipsos oculos Solis et Iustitiae facile frustrentur; nam et aves et rursum canes et mures, immo vero etiam induunt.

III, 7 Cumque iam humanitate commotos, misericordia fletuum adfectos omnis satis crederem, Solis et Iustitiae testatus oculum casumque praesentem meum commendans deum providentiae, paulo altius aspectu relato (laetum) conspicio prorsus totum populum—risu cachinnabili diffluebant—nec secus illum bonum hospitem parentemque meum Milonem risu maximo dissolutum.

III, 16 Audivi vesperi, meis his, inquam, auribus audivi, quod non celerius sol caelo ruisset noctique ad exercendas inlecebras magiae maturius cessisset, ipsi Soli nubilam caliginem et perpetuas tenebras comminantem.

XI, 5 Inde primigenti Phryges Pessinuntiam deum matrem, hinc autochtones Attici Cecropeiam Minervam; illic fluctuantes Cyprii Paphiam Venerem, Cretes sagittiferi Dictynnam Dianam, Siculi trilingues Stygiam Proserpinam, Eleusinii vetustam deam Cererem et Iunonem alii, Bellonam alii, Hecatam isti, Rhamnusiam illi, qui nascentis dei Solis inchoantibus inlustrantur radiis Aethiopes Arique priscaque doctrina pollentes Aegyptii caeremoniis me propriis percolentes appellant vero nomine reginam Isidem.

XI, 24 Et umeris dependebat pone tergum talorum tenus pretiosa chlamyda. Quaqua tamen viseres, colore vario circumnotatis insignibar animalibus; hinc dracones Indici, inde grypes Hyperborei quos in speciem primitiae alitis generat mundus alter. Hanc Olympiacam stolam sacrati nuncupant. At manu dextera gerebam flammis adultam facem et caput decore corona cinxerat palmae

candidae foliis in modum radiorum prosistentibus. Sic ad instar Solis exornato me et in vicem simulacri constituto repente velis reductis in aspectum populus errabat. Exhinc festissimum celebravi natalem sacrorum et suaves epulae et faceta convivia.

XI, 26 Ecce transcurso signifero circulo Sol magnus annum compleverat et quietem meam rursus interpellat numinis benefici cura pervigilis et rursus teletae, rursus sacrorum commonet.

LUCIANUS OF SAMOSATA (125-195 A.D.)

DE SYRIA DEA (*ed.* A. M. Harmon, London 1943)

34 Ἐν αὐτῷ δὲ τῷ νηῷ ἐσιόντων ἐν ἀριστερῇ κέαται πρῶτα μὲν θρόνος Ἡελίου, αὐτοῦ δὲ ἕδος οὐκ ἔνι· μούνου γὰρ Ἡελίου καὶ Σεληναίης ξόανα οὐ δεικνύουσιν. Ὅτευ δὲ εἵνεκα ὧδε νομίζουσιν, ἐγὼ καὶ τόδε ἔμαθον. Λέγουσι τοῖσι μὲν ἄλλοισι θεοῖσιν ὅσιον ἔμμεναι ξόανα ποιέεσθαι, οὐ γὰρ σφέων ἐμφανέα πάντεσι τὰ εἴδεα· Ἥλιος δὲ καὶ Σεληναίη πάμπαν ἐναργέες καὶ σφέας πάντες ὁρέουσι. Κοίη ὧν αἰτίη ξοανουργίης τοῖσι ἐν τῷ ἠέρι φαινομένοισι;

PAUSANIAS (ca. the middle of the 2nd century A.D.)

PERIHEGESIS (*ed.* W. H. S. Jones and H. A. Ormerod, London 1926-1935; *IG*, fasc. 2, p. 46)

VIII, 9, 4 (Mantinea) Τό δε χωρίον τοῦτο, ἔνθα ὁ ταφός ἐστι τοῦ Ἀρκάδος, καλοῦσιν Ἡλίου βωμούς.

VIII, 30, 7 (Megalopolis) Ἀνδρίαντες ἐν οἰκήματι Καλλιγνώτου τε καὶ Μέντα καὶ Σωσιγένους τε καὶ Πώλου . . . . . κεῖται δὲ ἐντὸς τοῦ περιβόλου θεῶν τοσάδε ἄλλων ἀγάλματα τὸ τετράγωνον παρεχόμενοι σχῆμα, Ἑρμῆς τε ἐπικλήσιν Ἀγήτωρ καὶ Ἀπόλλων καὶ Ἀθηνᾶ τε καὶ Ποσειδῶν ἔτι δὲ Ἥλιος ἐπωνυμίαν ἔχων Σωτὴρ δὲ εἶναι καὶ Ἡρακλῆς . . . (*IG*, fasc. 2, p. 110)

HERODIANUS OF SYRIA (140-240 A.D.)

AB EXCESSU DIVI MARCI LIBRI OCTO (*ed.* C. Stavenhagen, Stuttgart 1967)

V, 5, 3 ὁ δὲ Ἀντωνῖνος ἀπάρας τῆς Συρίας ἐλθών τε ἐς τὴν Νικομήδειαν ἐχείμαζε, τῆς ὥρας τοῦ ἔτους οὕτως ἀπαιτούσης.

V, 5, 6/7 ὁ δέ καταφρονήσας τῶν ὑπὸ τῆς πρεσβύτιδος λεχθέντων, μηδ' ἄλλῳ τινὶ πεισθείς (οὐδὲ γὰρ προσίετο εἰ μή τοὺς ὁμοιοτρόπους τε

καὶ κόλακας αὐτοῦ τῶν ἁμαρτημάτων) βουλόμενος ἐν ἔθει γενέσθαι τῆς τοῦ σχήματος ὄψεως τήν τε σύγκλητον καὶ τὸν δῆμον Ῥωμαίων, ἀπόντος τε αὐτοῦ πεῖραν δοθῆναι πῶς φέρουσι τὴν ὄψιν τοῦ σχήματος, εἰκόνα μεγίστην γράψας παντὸς ἑαυτοῦ, οἷος προϊών τε καὶ ἱερουργῶν ἐφαίνετο, παραστήσας τε ἐν τῇ γραφῇ τὸν τύπον τοῦ ἐπιχωρίου θεοῦ, ᾧ δὴ καλλιερῶν ἐγέγραπτο, πέμψας τε ἐς τὴν Ῥώμην, ἐκέλευσεν ἐν τῷ μεσαιτάτῳ τῆς συγκλήτου τόπῳ ὑψηλοτάτῳ τε τὴν εἰκόνα ἀνατεθῆναι ὑπὲρ κεφάλης τοῦ ἀγάλματος τῆς Νίκης, ᾧ συνίοντες ἐς τὸ βουλευτήριον λιβανωτόν τε θυμιῶσιν ἕκαστος καὶ οἴνου σπένδουσιν. Προσέταξέ τε πάντας τοὺς Ῥωμαίων ἄρχοντας, καὶ εἴ τινες δημοσίας θυσίας ἐπιτελοῦσιν, πρὸ τῶν ἄλλων θεῶν οὓς δή καλοῦσιν ἱερουργοῦντες, ὀνομάζειν τὸν νέον θεὸν Ἐλαιαγάβαλον.

V, 5, 8 Ὡς δὲ ἐς τὴν Ῥώμην ἀφίκετο τῷ προειρημένῳ σχήματι, οὐδὲν παράδοξον εἶδον οἱ Ῥωμαῖοι, τῇ γραφῇ ἐνειθισμένοι. Δοὺς δὲ τὰς συνήθεις τῷ δήμῳ νομὰς ἐπὶ τῇ τῆς βασιλείας διαδοχῇ, φιλοτίμως τε καὶ πολυτελῶς ἐπιτελέσας παντοδαπὰς θέας, νεών τε μέγιστον καὶ κάλλιστον κατασκευάσας τῷ θεῷ, βωμούς τε πλείστους περὶ τὸν νεὼν ἱδρύσας, ἑκάστοτε προϊὼν ἔωθεν ἑκατόμβας τε ταύρων καὶ προβάτων πολὺ πλῆθος κατέσφαττε τοῖς τε βωμοῖς ἐπετίθει, παντοδαποῖς ἀρώμασι σωρεύων, οἴνου τε τοῦ παλαιοτάτου καὶ καλλίστου πολλοὺς ἀμφορέας τῶν βωμῶν προχέων, ὡς ῥεῖθρα φέρεσθαι οἴνου τε καὶ αἵματος μεμιγμένου.

V, 5, 9 Περί τε τοὺς βωμοὺς ἐχόρευεν ὑπὸ παντοδαποῖς ἤχοις ὀργάνων, γύναιά τε ἐπιχώρια ἐχόρευε σὺν αὐτῷ, περιθέοντα τοῖς βωμοῖς, κύμβαλα ἠ τύμπανα μετὰ χεῖρας φέροντα· περιειστήκει δὲ πᾶσα ἡ σύγκλητος καὶ τὸ ἱππικὸν τάγμα ἐν θεάτρου σχήματι . . . .

V, 6, 1 . . . πλὴν καίτοι χορεύειν ἀεὶ καὶ ἱερουργεῖν δοκῶν, πλείστους ἀπέκτεινε τῶν ἐνδόξων τε καὶ πλουσίων, διαβληθέντας αὐτῷ ὡς ἀπαρεσκομένους καὶ σκώπτοντας αὐτοῦ τὸν βίον.

V, 6, 1 ἠγάγετο δὲ γυναῖκα τὴν εὐγενεστάτην Ῥωμαίων, ἣν Σεβαστὴν ἀναγορεύσας μετ' ὀλίγον χρόνον ἀπεπέμψατο, ἰδιωτεύειν κελεύσας καὶ τῶν τιμῶν παρελόμενος.

V, 6, 2 μετ' ἐκείνην δὲ προσποιησάμενος ἐρᾶν, ἵνα δὴ καὶ τὰ τῶν ἀνδρῶν πράττειν δοκοίη, παρθένου τῇ Ῥωμαίων Ἑστίᾳ ἱερωμένης ἁγνεύειν τε πρὸς τῶν ἱερῶν νόμων κελευομένης καὶ μέχρι τέλους τοῦ βίου παρθενεύεσθαι, ἀποσπάσας αὐτὴν τῆς ἑστίας καὶ τοῦ ἱεροῦ παρθενῶνος γυναῖκα ἔθετο, ἐπιστείλας τῇ συγκλήτῳ καὶ παραμυθησάμενος ἀσέβημά τε καὶ ἁμάρτημα τηλικοῦτον, φήσας ἀνθρώπινόν τι πεπονθέναι πάθος·

ἔρωτι γὰρ τῆς κόρης ἑαλωκέναι, ἁρμόζοντά τε καὶ σεβάσμιον εἶναι γάμον ἱερέως τε καὶ ἱερείας. Πλὴν καὶ ταύτην μετ' οὐ πολὺ ἀπεπέμψατο, τρίτην δὲ πάλιν ἠγάγετο, ἀναφέρουσαν τὸ γένος ἐς Κόμοδον.

V, 6, 3 Ἔπαιζε δὲ γάμους οὐ μόνον ἀνθρωπείους, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῷ θεῷ, ᾧ ἱεράτευε, γυναῖκα ἐζήτει· καὶ τῆς τε Παλλάδος τὸ ἄγαλμα, ὅ κρύπτον καὶ ἀόρατον σέβουσι Ῥωμαῖοι, ἐς τὸν ἑαυτοῦ θάλαμον μετήγαγε· καὶ μὴ κινηθὲν ἐξ οὗπερ ἦλθεν ἀπὸ Ἰλίου, εἰ μὴ ὅτε πυρὶ κατεφλέχθη ὁ νεὼς, ἐκίνησεν οὗτος, καὶ πρὸς γάμον δὴ ἐς τὴν βασίλειον αὐλὴν τῷ θεῷ ἀνήγαγε.

V, 6, 4 Φήσας δὲ ἀπαρέσκεσθαι αὐτόν ὡς πάντα ἐν ὅπλοις καὶ πολεμικῇ θεῷ, τῆς Οὐρανίας τὸ ἄγαλμα μετεπέμψατο, σεβόντων αὐτὸ ὑπερφυῶς Καρχηδονίων τε καὶ τῶν κατὰ τὴν Λιβύην ἀνθρώπων. Φασὶ δὲ αὐτὸ Διδὼ τὴν Φοινίσσαν ἱδρύσασθαι, ὅτε δὴ τὴν ἀρχαίαν Καρχηδόνα πόλιν ἔκτισε, βύρσαν κατατεμοῦσα. Λίβυες μὲν οὖν αὐτὴν Οὐρανίαν καλοῦσι, Φοίνικες δὲ Ἀστροάρχην ὀνομάζουσι, σελήνην εἶναι θέλοντες.

V, 6, 5 Ἁρμόζειν τοίνυν λέγων ὁ Ἀντωνῖνος γάμον ἡλίου καὶ σελήνης τό τε ἄγαλμα μετεπέμψατο καὶ πάντα τὸν ἐκεῖθεν χρυσόν, χρήματά τε πάμπλειστα τῇ θεῷ ἐς προῖκα δὴ ἐπιδοῦναι ἐκέλευσε. Κομισθέν τε τὸ ἄγαλμα συνῴκισε δὴ τῷ θεῷ, κελεύσας πάντας τοὺς κατὰ Ῥώμην καὶ Ἰταλίαν ἀνθρώπους ἑορτάζειν παντοδαπαῖς τε εὐφροσύναις καί εὐωχίαις χρῆσθαι δημοσίᾳ τε καὶ ἰδίᾳ ὡς δὴ γαμούντων θεῶν.

V, 6, 6 Κατεσκεύασε δὲ καὶ ἐν τῷ προαστείῳ νεών μέγιστόν τε καὶ πολυτελέστατον, ἐς ὃν ἑκάστου ἔτους κατῆγε τὸν θεὸν ἀκμάζοντος θέρους. Πανηγύρεις τε παντοδαπᾶς συνεκρότει, ἱπποδρόμους τε κατασκεύσας καὶ θέατρα, διά τε ἡνιοχείας καί πάντων θεάματών τε καὶ ἀκροαμάτων πλείστων εὐωχούμενον τὸν δῆμον καὶ παννυχίζοντα εὐφραίνειν ᾤετο. Τόν τε θεὸν αὐτὸν ἐπιστήσας ἅρματι χρυσῷ τε καὶ λίθοις τιμιωτάτοις πεποικιλμένῳ κατῆγεν ἀπὸ τῆς πόλεως ἐπὶ τὸ προάστειον.

V, 6, 7 Τὸ δὲ ἅρμα ἦγεν ἑξάπωλον, ἵππων λευκῶν μεγίστων τε καὶ ἀσπίλων, χρυσῷ πολλῷ καὶ φαλάροις ποικίλοις κεκοσμημένων, τάς τε ἡνίας κατεῖχεν οὐδείς, οὐδὲ τοῦ ἅρματος ἄνθρωπος ἐπέβαινεν, αὐτῷ δὲ περιέκειντο ὡς ἡνιοχοῦντι δὴ τῷ θεῷ.

V, 7, 3/4 Ἀποδείκνυται δὴ Καῖσαρ ὁ Ἀλέξανδρος, ὕπατός τε σὺν αὐτῷ Ἀντωνίνῳ. Κατελθών τε ἐς τὴν σύγκλητον ταῦτα ἐκύρωσε, γελοιότατα ψηφισαμένων πάντων ἃ ἐκελεύοντο, πατέρα μὲν ἐκεῖνον δοκεῖν ἔτη γεγονότα περί που ἑκκαίδεκα, τὸν Ἀλέξανδρον δὲ υἱὸν τοῦ

δωδεκάτου ἐπιβαίνοντα. Ὡς δὲ Καῖσαρ ὁ Ἀλέξανδρος ἀπεδείχθη, ὁ Ἀντωνῖνος αὐτὸν ἐβούλετο τὰ ἑαυτοῦ παιδεύειν ἐπιτηδεύματα, ὀρχεῖσθαί τε καὶ χορεύειν τῆς τε ἱερωσύνης κοινωνεῖν καὶ σχήμασι καὶ ἔργοις ὁμοίοις.

V, 7, 5 ἡ δὲ μήτηρ αὐτὸν ἡ Μαμαία ἀπῆγε μὲν τῶν αἰσχρῶν καὶ ἀπρεπῶν βασιλεῦσιν ἔργων, διδασκάλους δὲ πάσης παιδείας λάθρᾳ μετεπέμπετο, τοῖς τε σώφροσιν αὐτὸν ἤσκει μαθήμασι, παλαίστραις τε καὶ τοῖς ἀνδρῶν γυμνασίοις εἴθιζε, παιδείαν τε τὴν Ἑλλήνων καὶ Ῥωμαίων ἐπαίδευεν.

V, 7, 6 Ὁ δ' Ἀντωνῖνος ἐν δέει πολλῷ γενόμενος, παραλαβῶν τὸν Ἀλέξανδρον, συγκαθεσθεὶς αὐτῷ ἐν τῷ βασιλικῷ φορείῳ, ὅπερ διὰ χρυσοῦ πολλοῦ καὶ λιθῶν τιμίων πεποίκιλτο, κατῆλθεν ἐς τὸ στρατόπεδον σὺν τῷ Ἀλεξάνδρῳ.

V, 7, 9 Τὰ δὲ σώματα τοῦ τε Ἀντωνίνου καὶ τῆς Σοαιμίδος παρέδοσαν σύρειν τε καὶ ἐνυβρίζειν τοῖς βουλομένοις· ἅπερ ἐπὶ πόλυ διὰ πάσης τῆς πόλεως συρέντα τε καὶ λωβηθέντα ἐς τοὺς ὀχετούς ἀπερρίφθη τοὺς ἐς τὸν Θύβριν ποταμὸν ῥεόντας.

VI, 1, 3 Πρῶτον μὲν οὖν τὰ ἀγάλματα τῶν θεῶν, ἅπερ ἔτυχεν ἐκεῖνος κινήσας καὶ μεταγάγων (Ἐλαγάβαλος), ἔπεμψαν ἐς τοὺς ἰδίους καὶ ἀρχαίους ναούς τε καὶ σηκούς.

Q.SEPTIMIUS FLORENS TERTULLIANUS (150-ca. 230 A.D.)

DE SPECTACULIS (*ed.* E. Dekkers in *CCL* 1, Turnhout 1954).

VIII, 1 Ut et de locis, secundum propositum exsequar, circus Soli principaliter consecratur: cuius aedis medio spatio et effigies de fastigio aedis emicat, quod non putaverint sub tecto consecrandum quem in aperto habent.

VIII, 2 ..... Qui spectaculum primum a Circe habent, Soli patri suo, ut volunt, editum affirmant: ab ea et Circi appellationem argumentantur.

VIII, 5 ..... Obelisci enormitas, ut Hermateles affirmat, Soli prostituta. Scriptura eius unde eius et census: de Aegypto superstitio est.

IX, 3 De iugo vero quadrigas Soli, bigas Lunae sanxerunt.

XX, 2 Novam proxime defensionem suaviludii cuiusdam audivi. "Sol", inquit, "immo ipse etiam Deus de caelo spectat, nec contaminatur". Plane, Sol et in cloacam radios suos defert, nec inquinatur.

APOLOGETICUM, (*ed.* J. P. Waltzing, Paris 1961)

XII, 4 Ungulis eraditis latera Christianorum: at in deos vestros per omnia membra validius incumbunt asciae et runcinae et scobinae. Cervices ponimus: ante plumbum et glutinem et gomphos sine capite sunt dei vestri. Ad bestias inpellimur: certe quas Libero et Cybele et Caelesti adplicatis.

XV, 2 Sed et histrionum litterae omnem foeditatem eorum designant. Luget Sol filium detractum de caelo, laetantibus vobis, et Cybele pastorem suspirat fastidiosum non erubescentibus vobis et substinetis Iovis elogia cantari, et Iunonem, Venerem, Minervam a pastore iudicari.

XXIII, 6 Ista ipsa Virgo Caelestis, pluviarum pollicitatrix, iste ipse Aesculapius, medicinarum (demonstrator), alia die morituris Socordio et Tenatio et Asclepiodoto vitae subministrator, nisi se daemonas confessi fuerint, Christiano mentiri non audentes, ibidem illius Christiani procacissimi sanguinem fundite!

XXIV, 7 Atque adeo et Aegyptiis permissa est tam vanae superstitionis potestas avibus et bestiis consecrandis, et capite damnandis, qui aliquem huiusmodi deum occiderint. Unicuique etiam provinciae et civitati suus deus est, ut Syriae Atargatis, ut Arabiae Dusares, ut Noricis Belenus, ut Africae Caelestis, ut Mauretaniae reguli sui.

CASSIUS DIO COCCEIANUS (155-230 A.D.)

HISTORIA ROMANA (*ed.* Loeb, London, 1927 = LXXIX)

LXXVIII, 31, 2 Καί τι καὶ ὑπό τοῦ Ἡλίου, ὃν Ἐλεγάβαλον ἐπικαλοῦσι καὶ μεγάλως θρησκεύουσιν, ἄλλων τέ τινων μαντειῶν ἀναπεισθείς, ἐπεχείρησε τόν τε Μακρῖνον καθελεῖν καὶ τὸν Ἀουῖτον τὸν τῆς Μαίσης ἔγγονον αὐτοκράτορα, καίπερ παιδίον ἔτι ὄντα, ἀντικαταστῆσαι, καὶ κατειργάσατο ἑκάτερον· . . . . . .

LXXVIII, 32, 2 Τόν τε γὰρ Ἀουῖτον, ὃν Μάρκον Αὐρήλιον Ἀντωνῖνον ἤδη προσηγόρευον, περιφέροντες ὑπὲρ τοῦ τείχους, καὶ εἰκόνας τινὰς τοῦ Καρακάλλου παιδικὰς ὡς καὶ προσφερεῖς αὐτῷ ἀποδεικνύντες, παῖδά τε ὄντως αὐτόν ἐκείνου καί διάδοχον τῆς ἀρχῆς ἀναγκαῖον εἶναι λέγοντες, καὶ "τί ταῦτα, ὦ συστρατιῶται, ποιεῖτε; τί δὲ οὕτω τῷ τοῦ εὐεργέτου ὑμῶν υἱεῖ μάχεσθε;" ἐκβοῶντες, πάντας τοὺς

σὺν τῷ Ἰουλιανῷ στρατιώτας, ἄλλως τε καὶ προθύμως πρὸς τὸ νεωτεροποιεῖν ἔχοντας, διέφθειραν, ὥστε τοὺς μὲν ἐπιτεταγμένους σφίσιν πλὴν τοῦ Ἰουλιανοῦ . . . ἀποκτεῖναι, ἑαυτοὺς δὲ τά τε ὅπλα τῷ Ψευδαντωνίνῳ παραδοῦναι.

LXXIX, 3, 3 (ed. Loeb, LXXX) . . ἐς δὲ δὴ τἄλλα πάντα καὶ αἰσχρουργότατα καὶ παρανομώτατα καὶ μιαιφονώτατα ἐξοκείλας, ὥστε τὰ μέν τινα αὐτῶν μήδ' ἀρχὴν πώποτ' ἐν τῇ Ῥώμῃ γενόμενα ὡς καὶ πάτρια ἀκμάσαι, τὰ δὲ καὶ τολμηθέντα ἄλλοτε ἄλλοις ὡς ἑκάστοις, ἔτεσι τρισὶ καὶ μησὶν ἐννέα ἡμέραις τε τέτταρσιν, ἐν αἷς ἦρξεν, ὡς γ' ἄν τις ἀπὸ τῆς μάχης ἐν ᾗ τὸ παντελὲς κράτος ἔσχεν ἀριθμήσειεν, ἀνθῆσαι.

LXXIX. 8, 4 Τῶν δὲ δὴ παρανομημάτων αὐτοῦ καὶ τὸ κατὰ τὸν Ἐλεγάβαλον ἔχεται, οὐχ ὅτι θεόν τινα ξενικὸν ἐς τὴν Ῥωμὴν ἐσήγαγεν, οὐδ' ὅτι καινοπρεπέστατα αὐτὸν ἐμεγάλυνεν, ἀλλ' ὅτι καὶ πρὸ τοῦ Διὸς αὐτοῦ ἤγαγεν αὐτόν, καὶ ὅτι καὶ ἱερέα αὐτοῦ ἑαυτὸν ψηφισθῆναι ἐποίησεν, ὅτι τε τὸ αἰδοῖον περιέτεμε, καὶ ὅτι χοιρείων κρέων, ὡς καὶ καθαρώτερον ἐκ τούτων θρησκεύσων, ἀπείχετο (ἐβουλεύσατο μὲν γὰρ πανταπᾶσιν αὐτὸ ἀποκόψαι· ἀλλ' ἐκεῖνο μὲν τῆς μαλακίας ἕνεκα ποιῆσαι ἐπεθύμησε, τοῦτο δὲ ὡς καὶ τῇ τοῦ Ἐλεγαβάλου ἱερατείᾳ προσῆκον ἔπραζεν· ἐξ οὗ δὴ καὶ ἑτέροις τῶν συνόντων συχνοῖς ὁμοίως ἐλυμήνατο)· καὶ μέντοι καὶ ὅτι τὴν ἐσθῆτα τὴν βαρβαρικήν, ᾗ οἱ τῶν Σύρων ἱερεῖς χρῶνται, καὶ δημοσίᾳ πολλάκις ἐωρᾶτο ἐνδεδυμένος· ἀφ' οὗπερ οὐχ ἥκιστα καὶ τὴν τοῦ Ἀσσυρίου ἐπωνυμίαν ἔλαβεν.

LXXIX, 9, 1 ἔγημε δὲ Κορνηλίαν Παῦλαν, ἵνα δὴ θᾶσσον, ὥσπερ ἔφη, πατήρ γένηται ὁ μηδ' ἀνὴρ εἶναι δυνάμενος . . . .

LXXIX, 9, 3 εἶτα τὴν Παῦλαν ὡς καὶ κηλιδά τινα περὶ τὸ σῶμα ἔχουσαν ἀποπέμψας Ἀκυλίᾳ Σεουήρᾳ συνῴκησεν, ἐκφανέστατα παρανομήσας· ἱερωμένην γὰρ αὐτὴν τῇ Ἑστίᾳ ἀσεβέστατα ἤσχυνεν. Ἐτόλμησε δὲ καὶ εἰπεῖν ὅτι "ἵνα δὴ καὶ θεοπρεπεῖς παῖδες ἔκ τε ἐμοῦ τοῦ ἀρχιερέως ἔκ τε ταύτης τῆς ἀρχιερείας γεννῶνται, τοῦτ' ἐποίησα".

LXXIX, 9, 4 Καὶ ἐφ' οἷς αὐτὸν ἐν τῇ ἀγορᾷ αἰκισθέντα εἶτα ἐς τὸ δεσμωτήριον ἐμβληθῆναι ἔδει, ἐπὶ τούτοις ἐκαλλωπίζετο. Καὶ οὐδ' ἐκείνην μέντοι ἐπὶ πολὺ κατέσχεν, ἀλλὰ ἑτέραν, εἶθ' ἑτέραν καὶ μάλα ἄλλην ἔγημε . . .

LXXIX, 9, 5 Τῷ δὲ δὴ Βάσσῳ, ὅτι γυναῖκα καὶ εὐπρεπῆ καὶ εὐγενῆ εἶχεν· τοῦ τε γὰρ Σεουήρου (τοῦ) Κλαυδίου καὶ τοῦ Ἀντωνίνου τοῦ Μάρκου ἀπόγονος ἦν. Ἀμέλει καὶ ἔγημεν αὐτήν, μηδὲ ἐκθρηνῆσαι τὴν συμφορὰν ἐπιτρέψας.

LXXIX, 11 Ἵνα δὲ παρῶ τάς τε βαρβαρικάς ᾠδας ἃς ὁ Σαρδανάπαλλος τῷ Ἐλεγαβάλῳ ᾖδε τῇ μητρὶ ἅμα καὶ τῇ τήθῃ, τάς τε ἀπορρήτους θυσίας ἃς αὐτῷ ἔθυε, παῖδας σφαγιαζόμενους καὶ μαγγανεύμασι χρώ μενος, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐς τὸν ναὸν αὐτοῦ λέοντα καὶ πίθηκον καὶ ὄφιν τινὰ ζῶντα ἐγκατακλείσας, αἰδοῖά τε ἀνθρώπου ἐμβαλών, καὶ ἄλλ' ἄττα ἀνοσιουργῶν, περιάπτοις τε τισὶ μυρίοις ἀεί ποτε χρώμε νος, ...

LXXIX, 12, 1-2 Καὶ γυναῖκα, τό γελοιότατον, Ἐλαγαβάλῳ ἐμνήστευσε καθάπερ καὶ γάμου παίδων τε δεομένῳ. Καὶ ἔδει γὰρ μήτε πενιχράν μήτε δυσγενῆ τινὰ εἶναι αὐτήν, τὴν Οὐρανίαν τὴν τῶν Καρχηδονίων ἐπελέξατο, καὶ ἐκεῖθέν τε αὐτὴν μετεπέμψατο καὶ ἐς τὸ παλάτιον καθίδρυσεν, ἔδνα τε αὐτῇ παρὰ πάντων τῶν ὑπηκόων, ὥσπερ καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἑαυτοῦ γυναικῶν, ἤθροισε. 2. Τὰ μὲν οὖν ἔδνα, ὅσα ἐδόθη ζῶντος αὐτοῦ, μετά ταῦτα ἐσεπράχθη· τὴν δὲ δὴ προῖκα οὐκ ἔφη κομίσασθαι, πλήν δύο λεόντων χρυσῶν, οἳ καὶ συνεχωνεύθησαν.

LXXIX, 19, 1 ὡς δέ ποτε καὶ ἀνελεῖν αὐτὸν ἐπεχείρησεν, οὐ μόνον οὐδὲν ἤνυσεν, ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτὸς ἀποθανεῖν ἐκινδύνευσεν·

LXXIX, 19, 2 ὅ τε γὰρ Ἀλέξανδρος ὑπό τε τῆς μητρὸς καὶ τῆς τήθης ὑπό τε τῶν στρατιωτῶν ἰσχυρῶς ἐφυλάσσετο, καὶ οἱ δορυφόροι αἰσθόμενοι τὴν ἐπιχείρησιν τοῦ Σαρδαναπάλλου δεινῶς ἐθορύβησαν, οὐ πρίν τε ἐπαύσαντο στασιάζοντες ἢ τὸν Σαρδανάπαλλον τὸ στρατόπεδον σὺν τῷ Ἀλεζάνδρῳ καταλαβόντα, πολλά (3) τε ἱκετεύσαντα καὶ τοὺς ἐξαιτηθέντας παρ' αὐτῶν τῶν συναλγαινόντων αὐτῷ ἐκδοῦναι ἀναγκασθέντα, ὑπέρ τε τοῦ Ἱεροκλέους οἰκτρὰ λαλήσαντα καὶ δάκρυσι κλαύσαντα . . . . μόλις αὐτοὺς ἐκμειλίξασθαι.

LXXIV, 20, 1 μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα ἐπιβεβουλευκὼς πάλιν τῷ Ἀλεξάνδρῳ, καὶ θορυβησάντων ἐπὶ τούτῳ τῶν δορυφόρων . . . . φεύγειν πως ἐπεχείρησε.

LXXIX, 20, 2 Καὶ ἔμελλεν ἐς τύλλον ἐμβληθεὶς ἐκδρᾶναί ποι, φωραθεὶς δὲ ἀπεσφάγη . . . .

καὶ αὐτῷ καὶ ἡ μήτηρ . . . συναπώλετο.

. . . καὶ τὰ σώματα γυμνωθέντα τὸ μὲν πρῶτον διὰ πάσης τῆς πόλεως ἐσύρη, ἔπειτα τὸ μὲν τῆς γυναικὸς ἄλλως πως ἐρρίφη, τὸ δὲ ἐκείνου ἐς τὸν ποταμὸν ἐνεβλήθη.

LXXIX, 21, 2 Ὁ τε Ἐλαγάβαλος (The god) αὐτὸς ἐκ τῆς Ῥώμης πανταπᾶσιν ἐξαπεσε. (Ἀλέξανδρος).

M. MINUCIUS FELIX (ca. 230 A.D.)

OCTAVIUS (*ed.* J. Beaujeu, Paris 1964).

XXXII, 5 In Sole adeo, qui vivendi omnibus causa est, videre non possumus; radiis acies submovetur, obtutus intuentis hebetatur, et si diutius inspicias, omnis visus extinguitur.

XXXII, 6 Quid? ipsum Solis artificem, illum luminis fontem possis sustinere, cum te ab eius fulgoribus avertas, a fulminibus abscondas?

XXXII, 8 ..... In Sole adeo rursus intende: caelo adfixus, sed terris omnibus sparsus est: pariter praesens ubique interest et miscetur omnibus, nusquam eius claritudo violatur.

ARNOBIUS (time of Diocletianus, ca. 300 A.D.)

ADVERSUS NATIONES LIBRI VII (*ed.* A. Reifferscheid in *CSEL* IV, 1875; *ed.* R. Laurenti, Turin 1962).

1, 2 Numquid ipse siderum Sol princeps, cuius omnia luce vestiuntur, atque animantur calore, exarsit, intepuit, atque in contrarios habitus moderaminis soliti temperamenta corrupit?

I, 29 Quis, ne fixa pigritiae stupore torpescerent elementa vitalia, Solis ignes constituit ad rerum incrementa futuros? Solem deum cum esse credatis, conditorem eius, opificemque non quaeritis?

II, 58 Quemadmodum Sol ipso uno, eodemque contactu tam varias res efficiat, quinimmo contrarias?

III, 30 Nam quid de ipso dicimus Iove, quem Solem esse dictitavere sapientes, agitantem pinnatos currus, turba consequente divorum?

III, 33 Quid? Cum Liberum, Apollinem, Solem, unum esse contendistis numen vocabulis amplificatum tribus, nonne sententiis vestris deorum imminuitur census, et opinio praedicata dilabitur? Nam si verum est Solem eundem Liberum esse, eundemque Apollinem, sequitur ut in rerum natura neque Apollo sit aliquis, neque Liber: atque ita per vos ipsos aboletur, eraditur Semeleius, Pythius: alter foeculentae hilaritatis dator, Sminthiorum alter pernicies murum.

III, 35 Summa omnis illuc redit: ut neque Sol deus sit, neque luna, neque aether, tellus et caetera.

IV, 14 Aiunt igitur theologi vestri et vetustatis absconditae conditores, tres in rerum natura Ioves esse: ex quibus unus Aethere sit patre progenitus, alter Caelo, tertius vero Saturno, apud insulam Cretam et sepulturae traditus et procreatus. Quinque Soles, et Mercurios quinque: ex quibus, ut referunt, Sol primus Iovis filius dicitur, et Aetheris habetur nepos; secundus aeque Iovis filius, et Hyperiona proditus genetrice; tertius Vulcano, non Lemnio, sed Nili qui fuerit filius, quartus Ialysi pater, quem Rhodi peperit heroicis temporibus Acantho; quintus Scythici regis et versipellis habetur Circae.

IV, 16 ..... aut stultitiae crimen incurrat, si id attribuat cunctis, quod esse oportebat unius?

IV, 17 Possumus haec eadem de Mercuriis, Solibus, immo de aliis omnibus quorum numeros tenditis et multiplicatis, expromere.

IV, 22 Ex Hyperiona, inquitis, matre et Iove Iaculatore fulminis, Sol aureus et flagrantissimus natus est; .....

V, 42 Attidem cum nominamus, Solem, inquit, significamus, et dicimus: sed si Attis Sol est, quemadmodum connumeratis, et dicitis, quis erit Attis ille, quem in Phrygia genitum vestrae produnt atque indicant litterae? Quem passum esse res certas, fecisse item res certas? Quem in spectaculis ludicris theatra universa noverunt? Cui inter sacros cultus res videmus fieri specialiter annuas, nominatimque divinas? Utrumne ab Sole ad hominem, an ab homine ad Solem vocabuli huius facta translatio est? Si enim nomen istud principaliter habet originem Solis, quid tandem de vobis Sol aureus meruit, ut ei cum semiviro faceretis vocabulum istud esse commune?

VI, 10 Nam cum omnes homines teretem esse Solem indubitabili luminum contemplatione videamus: os illi vos hominis, et mortalium corporum liniamenta donatis.

VI, 12 Ecce si aliquis, vobis nescientibus et ignaris, rex urbanus et callidus ex foribus suis Solem tollat, et in Mercurii transferat sedem: Mercurium rursus arripiat, atque in Solis faciat commigrare delubrum, uterque enim a vobis glaber, atque ore compingitur levi, detque huic radios, Solis capiti petasunculum superponat: quibus modis internoscere poteritis utrumne Sol iste sit, an ille Mercurius, cum habitus vobis deos, non oris soleat proprietas indicare?

SHA, HADRIANUS (*ed.* E. Hohl, Liepzig 1955 [2]; I. Lugli, *Fontes* III, 1955, 323).

19, 12-13 Transtulit (Hadrianus) et colossum stantem atque suspensum per Decrianum architectum de eo loco, in quo nunc templum urbis est, ingenti molimine, ita ut operi etiam elephantos viginti quattuor exhiberet. Et cum hoc simulacrum post Neronis vultum, cui antea dicatum fuerat, Soli consecrasset, aliud tale Apollodoro architecto auctore facere Lunae molitus est.

SHA, AURELIANUS, scripsit Flavius Vopiscus (305-337 A.D.), (*ed.* E. Hohl, Leipzig 1955 [2])

1, 3 Cumque ad templum Solis venissemus ab Aureliano principe consecratum, quod ipse nonihilum ex ejus origine sanguinem duceret, quaesivit a me quis vitam ejus in litteras rettulisset.

4, 2 Matrem quidem ejus Callicrates Tyrius, Graecorum longe doctissimus scriptor, sacerdotem templi Solis, qui in vico eo, in quo habitabant parentes, ... fuisse dicit.

5, 5 Data est ei praeterea, cum legatus ad Persas isset, patera, qualis solet imperatoribus dari a rege Persarum, in qua insculptus erat Sol eo habitu, quo colebatur ab eo templo, in quo mater ejus fuerat sacerdos.

14, 3 Dii faciant, et deus certus Sol, ut et Senatus de me sic judicet!

25, 3-6 Cumque Aureliani equites fatigati iam paene discederent ac terga darent, subito vi numinis, quod postea est proditum, hortante quadam divina forma per pedites etiam equites restituti sunt. Fugata est Zenobia cum Zaba et plenissime parta victoria. Recepto igitur orientis statu Emesam victor Aurelianus ingressus est ac statim ad templum Heliogabali tetendit, quasi communi officio vota soluturus. Verum illic eam formam numinis repperit, quam in bello sibi faventem vidit. Quare et illic templa fundavit donariis ingentibus positis et Romae Soli templum posuit maiore honorificentia consecratum.

28, 5 Tunc allatae vestes, quas in templo Solis videmus, consertae gemmis, tunc Persici dracones et tiarae, ...

31, 7 Templum sane Solis, quod apud Palmyram aquiliferi legio-

nis tertiae cum vexilliferis et draconariis et cornicinibus atque liticinibus diripuerunt, ad eam formam volo quae fuit reddi.

31, 9 Ego ad senatum scribam, petens, ut mittat pontificem qui dedicet templum.

35, 3 Sacerdotia composuit, templum Solis fundavit et porticibus (pontificibus) roboravit.

39, 2 Templum Solis magnificentissimum constituit, muros Urbis Romae sic ampliavit ut quinquaginta prope milia murorum ejus ambitus teneant.

48, 4 ... in porticibus templi Solis fiscalia vina ponuntur, non gratuita populo erroganda, sed pretio.

SHA, HELIOGABALUS, scripsit Aelius Lampridius (325-337 A.D.), (*ed.* E. Hohl, Leipzig 1955 [2])

1, 4 Igitur occiso Macrino eiusque filio Diadumeno, qui pari potestate imperii Antonini etiam nomen acceperat, in Varium Heliogabalum imperium conlatum est, idcirco quod Bassiani filius diceretur. Fuit autem Heliogabali vel Iovis vel Solis sacerdos ...

1, 6 Et hinc quidem plus dictus est Varius, post Heliogabalus a sacerdotio dei Heliogabali, cui templum Romae in eo loco constituit, in quo prius aedes Orci fuit, quem e Suria advexit.

3, 4 Sed ubi primum ingressus est Urbem, omissis iis quae in provincia gerebantur, Heliogabalum in Palatio monte juxta aedes imperatorias consecravit, eique templum fecit, studens et Matris typum, et Vestae ignem, et Palladium, et ancilia, et omnia Romanis veneranda in illud transferre templum, et id agens ne quis Romae deus nisi Heliogabalus coleretur. Dicebat praeterea, Iudaeorum et Samaritorum religiones, et Christianam devotionem illuc transferendam, ut omnium culturarum secretum Heliogabali sacerdotium teneret.

5, 1 Ergo cum hybernasset Nicomediae, atque omnia sordide ageret, inireturque a viris et subaret, statim milites facti sui poenituit quod in Macrinum conspiraverant ut hunc principem facerent: atque in consobrinum ejusdem Heliogabali Alexandrum, quem Caesarem senatus Macrino interempto appellaverat, inclinavere animos.

7, 1 Matris etiam deum sacra accepit, et tauroboliatus est ut typum eriperet et alia sacra quae penitus habentur condita.

7, 4 Omnes sane deos sui dei ministros esse aiebat.

8, 1 Cecidit et humanas hostias lectis ad hoc pueris nobilibus et decoris per omnem Italiam patrimis et matrimis, credo ut major esset utrique parenti dolor.

14, 3 Ei cum in Palatium venissent, Alexandrum cum matre atque avia custoditum diligentissime postea in castra duxerunt.

15, 1 .... in castris vero milites precanti praefecto dixerunt se parsuros esse Heliogabalo, si et impuros homines et aurigas et histriones a se dimoveret atque ad bonam frugem rediret his maxime summotis, qui cum omnium dolore apud eum plurimum poterant et qui omnia eius vendebant vel veritate vel fumis. Remoti sunt denique ab eo Hierocles.

15, 4 Sed Heliogabalus et ingenti prece Hieroclem reposcebat impudentissimum hominem ....

17, 1 Post hoc in eum impetum factus est .... atque in latrina, ad quam confugerat, occisus. .... Tractus deinde per publicum. Addita iniuria cadaveri est, ut id in cloacam milites mitterent. Sed cum non cepisset cloaca fortuito, per pontem Aemilium adnexo pondere, ne fluitaret, in Tiberim abiectum est, ne umquam sepeliri posset. Tractum est cadaver eius etiam per circi spatia, priusquam in Tiberim praecipitaretur. ..... appellatus est post mortem Tiberinus ...

EUTROPIUS (ca. 350 A.D.)

Breviarium ab Urbe condita (*ed.* F. Rühl, Leipzig 1887)

VIII, 22 Creatus est post hos M. Aurelius Antonius. Hic Antonini Caracallae filius putabatur, sacerdos autem Heliogabali templi erat. Is cum Romam ingenti et militum et senatus expectatione venisset, probris se omnibus contaminavit. Impudicissime et obscenissime vixit, biennoque post et octo mensibus tumultu interfectus est militari et cum eo mater Symiasera.

XI, 15 Urbem Roman muris firmioribus cinxit (Aurelianus). Templum Solis aedificavit, in quo infinitum auri gemmarumque constituit.

IULIANUS (332-363 A.D.)

ORATIONES (*ed.* Hertlein, Spanheim, Leipzig 1875-76)

Or. 4, p. 156 πρὸ τῆς νεομηνίας εὐθέως μετὰ τὸν τελευταῖον τοῦ Κρόνου μῆνα ποιοῦμεν Ἡλίῳ τὸν περιφανέστατον ἀγῶνα, τὴν ἑορτὴν Ἡλίῳ καταφημίσαντες Ἀνικήτῳ . . . . . .

SEXTUS AURELIUS VICTOR (337-379 A.D.)

Sexti Aurelii Victoris Liber de Caesaribus, praecedunt Origo gentis Romanae et Liber de viris illustribus Urbis Romae, subsequitur Epitome de Caesaribus, recensuit Fr. Pichlmayr. *Editio stereotypa correctior editionis primae.* Addenda et corrigenda iterum collegit et adiecit R. Gruendel, Leipzig, 1966.

LIBER DE CAESARIBUS

23, 1 Accitusque Marcus Antonius Bassiano genitus, qui patre mortuo in Solis sacerdotium, quem Heliogabalum Syri vocant, tanquam asylum insidiarum metu confugerat, hincque Heliogabalus dictus; translatoque Romam dei simulacro in palatii penetralibus altaria constituit.

23, 2 Hoc impurius ne improbae quidem aut petulantes mulieres fuere: quippe orbe tot obscoenissimos perquirebat visendis tractandisve artibus libidinum ferendarum.

23, 3 Haec cum augerentur in dies ac magis magisque Alexandri, quem comperta Opilii nece Caesarem nobilitas nuncupaverat, amor cumularetur, in castris praetoriis tricesimo regni mense oppressus est.

EPITOME DE CAESARIBUS

23, 1 Aurelius Antoninus Varius, idem Heliogabalus dictus, Caracallae ex Soemeae consobrina occulte stuprata filius imperavit bienno et mensibus octo.

23, 2 Huius matris Soemeae avus, Bassianus nomine, fuerat Solis sacerdos, quem Phoenices, unde erat, Heliogabalum nominabant, a quo iste Heliogabalus dictus est.

23, 3 Is cum Roman ingenti militum et senatus expectatione venisset, probris se omnibus contaminavit. Cupiditatem stupri, quam adsequi naturae defectu non poterat, in se convertens, muliebri nomine Bassianam se pro Bassiano iusserat appellari.

Vestalem virginem quasi matrimonio jungens suo; abscisisque genitalibus, matri se Magna sacravit.

23, 4 Hic Marcellum, qui post Alexander est dictus, consobrinum suum, Caesarem fecit.

23, 5 Ipse tumultu militari interfectus est. Huius corpus per Urbis vias, more canini cadaveris, a militibus tractum est, militari cavillo appellantium, indomiae rabidaeque libidinis catulam. Novissime cum angustum foramen cloacae corpus minime reciperet, usque ad Tiberim deductum, adjecto pondere, ne umquam emergeret, in fluvium projectum est.

23, 7 Vixit annos sedecim atque ex re, quae acciderat, Tiberinus Tractitiusque appellatus est.

HIERONYMUS (ca. 347-420 A.D.)

INTERPRETATIO CHRONICAE EUSEBII PAMPHILI (*ed.* Migne, 1845).

EUSEBIUS PAMPHILUS. CHRONICORUM LIBRI DUO (*ed.* A. Schoene, I-II, Berlin 1866-1875).

Anno ab Abraham 1988 Cum ingenti triumphorum pompa Augustus Romam ingressus, et Cleopatrae liberi, Sol et Luna ante currum eius ducti (*ed.* Migne, p. 550).

Anno ab Abraham 2234 Marcus Aurelius Antonini Caracallae, ut putabatur, filius, et sacerdos Eliogabali templi, adeo impudice in imperio vixit, ut nullum genus obscenitatis omiserit (*ed.* Migne, p. 640).

Anno ab Abraham 2236 Eliogabalum templum Romae aedificatum (anno 223 p.C.) (*ed.* Migne, p. 642).

Anno ab Abraham 2291 Primus Agon Solis ab Aureliano constitutus. Aurelianus templum Soli aedificat (*ed.* Migne, p. 654).

CAECILIUS FIRMIANUS LACTANTIUS (time of Diocletianus and Constantinus, 4th century A.D.)

DIVINAE INSTITUTIONES ET EPITOME DIVINARUM (*ed.* S. Brandt, in *CSEL* XIX, 1897).

LIBER DE FALSA RELIGIONE, 12

Vulcano quoque id potuit adscribi, qui quidem putatur ignis; et tamen eum poetae non absciderunt. Potuit et Soli, in quo est

natura et causa gignentium; nam sine Solis igneo calore neque nasci quidquam, neque augeri potest.

LIBER DE IRA DEI, 13

Sol irrequietis cursibus et spatiis inaequalibus orbes annuos conficit, et aut oriens diem promit ad laborem, aut occidens noctem superducit ad requiem .....

LIBER DE FALSA SAPIENTIA PHILOSOPHORUM, 23

Fuisse Seneca inter Stoicos ait, qui deliberaret utrumne Soli quoque suos populos datur: inepte scilicet, qui dubitaverit.

LIBER DE VERO CULTU, 2

Vel si caeleste lumen, quod dicimus Solem, contemplari velint, iam sentient quam non indigeat lucernis eorum Deus, qui ipse in usum hominis tam claram, tam candidam lucem dedit.

LIBER DE ORIGINE ERRORIS, 5

Nos vero et quidem constanter negamus, ac vos, o philosophi; non solum indoctos et impios, verum etiam caecos, ineptos delitosque probamus, qui ignorantiam imperitorum vanitate vicistis. Illi enim Solem et lunam, vos etiam sidera deos putatis.

HILARIUS (4th. century = 337-379 A.D.)

DE TRINITATE, *CSEL*, XXII (*ed.* A. Zingerle, 1901)

VI, 10 Manichaeus enim abrupti in improbanda lege ac prophetis furoris, et diaboli quantum in se est professus assertor, et Solis sui nescius cultor, id quod in Virgine fuit, portionem unius substantiae praedicavit, et id Filium intelligi voluit, quod ex Dei substantia parte aliqua deductum apparuerit in carne.

PANEGYRICUS MAXIMIANO ET CONSTANTINO (fourth century A.D.) (*ed.* W. A. Baehrens, Leipzig 1911, Pan. VII, p. 169) *rep.* M. D. Pippidi, *Studii de Istorie a Religiilor Antice*, Bucarest 1969, p. 152, note 56.

O felix imperio, et post imperium felicior, dive Constantine, quem curru paene conspicuo, dum vicinos ortus repetit occasu, Sol ipse invecturus caelo excepit.

RUFIUS FESTUS AVIENUS (2nd part of the 4th. century A.D.)

DESCRIPTIO ORBIS TERRAE (*ed.* P. van de Woestyne, Bruges, 1961)

Urbs mediis Apamea dehinc constitit in arvis
et qua Phoebam procul incunabula lucem
prima fovent, Emesus fastigia celsea renidit:
nam diffusa solo latus explicat ac subit auras
turribus in caelum nitentibus: incola claris
cor studiis acuit, amplius imbuit ordo.
Denique flammicomo devoti pectori Soli
vitam agitant: Libanus frondosa cacumina turget,
et tamen his celsi certant fastigia templi.

CHRONICA MINORA I (*ed.* C. Frick, Leipzig 1892, 118-119)

Chronicon Anni 334

Antoninus Eliogaballus imp(eravit) annos VI m(enses) VIII d(ies) XVIII ..... Eliogaballium dedicatum est. Occisus Romae.

CHRONICA MINORA I, (*ed.* Th. Mommsen, Berlin 1892, 148 (= *ed.* C. Frick, Leipzig 1892, 120)

Chronographia anni 354

Aurelianus imp(eravit) ann(os) V m(enses) IIII d(ies) XX. Hic muro Urbem cinxit, templum Solis et castra in campo Agripp(a)e dedicavit, genium populi Romani aureum in rostra posuit .... Agonem Solis instituit (Aurelianus).

AMBROSIUS (ca. 330-397 A.D.)

HEXAMERON LIBRI SEX, IV, 1-2 (*CSEL*, XXXII, 1-2, *ed.* C. Schenkl, Leipzig 1897).

IV, 1 Et ideo prius firmamentum coeli aspice, quod ante Solem factum est: terram aspice, quae ante quam Sol procederet, coepit esse visibilis atque composita: germina ejus aspice anteriora Solis lumine ..... Noli ergo Deum credere, cui vides Dei munera esse praelata. ..... Si tam gratus est Sol consors et particeps creaturae, quam bonus est Sol ille iustitiae.

IV, 2 Deus ergo Pater dicit: fiat sol; et Filius fecit solem. Dignum enim erat, ut solem mundi faceret Sol justitiae.

Non ergo Sol aut luna fecunditatis auctores sunt: sed Deus Pater per Dominum Iesum omnibus liberalitatem fertilitas impertit.

AUGUSTINUS (354-430 A.D.)

DE CIVITATE DEI, IV, 23 (*ed.* B. Dombart-A. Kalb in *CCL* XLVII, f, 1955; I. Lugli, *Fontes* VIII (1962), 374, n° 489).

Ut quid ergo constituit Romanis deos Ianum, Iovem, Martem, Picum, Faunum, Tiberinum, Herculem et si quos alios? Ut quid Titus Tatius addidit Saturnum, Opem, Solem, Lunam, Vulcanum, Lucem et quoscumque alios addidit, inter quos etiam deam Cluacinam, Felicitate neglecta?

DE CIVITATE DEI, VII, 16 (*ed.* E. Hoffmann in *CSEL* XL, Sec. V, pars 1, 1898; *ed.* B. Dombart-A. Kalb in *CCL* XLVII f, 1955).

Ac per hoc omnes istos selectos deos hunc esse mundum volunt, in quibusdam universum, in quibusdam partes eius: universum sicut Iovem; partes eius, ut Genium, ut Matrem magnam, ut Solem et Lunam, vel potius Apollinem et Dianam.

QUAESTIONES DE GENESI, CXXXVI (*ed.* J. Zycha in *CSEL* XXVIII [2], Sec. III, pars 3, 1895; *ed.* in *CCL* XXXIII, 1955)

Sed etiam hic respondetur duos illum honores habuisse, et sacerdotium Solis et militatiae principatum; .... Deinde non simpliciter dictum est, quod sacerdos Solis esset, sed civitatis Solis, quae vocatur Heliopolis; abesse autem dicitur amplius quam viginti millibus a civitate Memphi, ...

SERMONES, XII (*ed.* in *CCL* XLI, 1961)

11 Deinde quaerimus: "Solem istum videt diabolus, an non videt? Si videt, quomodo ergo Sol deus est, quem diabolus videt? Si non videt, mali tamen eum homines vident, quomodo ergo deus est, quem vident qui non puro sunt corde? Aut si ut videri posset, etiam ipse mutatus est, et non hoc est quod videtur, quid si ergo vos aliud ostenditis, et aliud estis, ut imitari etiam solem, non tantum adorare possitis?"

12 Sol iste corporeus, quem corpus non esse arbitrantur (usque adeo nec quid sit corpus, intellegunt, qui de spiritalibus disputationibus se fallaciter jactant): sol ergo iste corporeus, tantum quia coeleste corpus est, illuminat terram nec ab ea obscuratur; ....

CONTRA FAUSTUM MANICHAEUM (*ed.* J. Zycha in *CSEL* XXV, Sec. VI, pars 1, 1891)

V, 11 Vos autem si spiritalis atque intelligibilis boni caritate, ac non corporalium phantasmatum cupiditate arderetis, ut cito dicam quod de vobis notissimum est, solem istum corporeum, non pro divina substantia et pro sapientiae luce coleretis.

IX, 2 Nam quid nisi oleastrum Gentium sapit adorare Solem et Lunam? Nisi forte propterea vos jam non putatis esse in oleastro gentium, quia spinas novi generis addidistis, et falsum Christum, quem cum sole et luna coleretis, non manu fabrili, sed perverso corde finxistis?

XIV, 11 Proinde isti in phantasmatibus fabularum suarum idola et daemonia nescientes colunt; in sole autem et luna noverunt se servire creaturae.

CONTRA SECUNDINUM MANICHAEUM (*ed.* J. Zycha in *CSEL* XXV, 1891)

XX Sed carnalis vestra cogitatio, adeo a locis corporalibus non recedit, ut Solem istum visibilem, ac per hoc corporeum, qui contineri nisi corporali loco non potest, et Deum et partem Dei esse dicatis.

XVI Quid, inquam potius eligam, quam id quod nos ut creaturam laudamus coelestem, vos autem ut portionem ipsius Creatoris adoratis. Quid enim inter cuncta visibilia isto sole praeclarius?

ENNARATIO IN PSALMUM XCIII (*ed.* in *CCL* XXXIX, 1956).

5 Qui dicunt Christus est Sol, mentiuntur de Sole. Novit Sol Dominum suum esse Christum et Creatorem suum.

ENNARATIO IN PSALMUM XXV (*ed.* in *CCL* XXXVIII, 1956)

II, 3 Sed et aliter bene intellegitur, quia est noster Sol justitiae veritas Christus; non iste Sol qui adoratur a paganis et Manichaeis, et videtur etiam a peccatoribus; sed ille alius cuius veritate humana natura illustratur, ad quem gaudent Angeli, ...

PAULUS OROSIUS (5th century A.D.)

ADVERSUS PAGANOS, VII, 18,5 (I. Lugli, *Fontes* VIII, Rome 1962, 79, n° 153)

Hic (Heliogabalus) sacerdos Heliogabali templi nullam sui nisi stuprorum flagitiorum totiusque obscenitatis infamem satis memoriam reliquit.

ACTA SANCTORUM QUOTQUOT TOTO ORBE COLUNTUR, (*ed.* Paris 1854-1925)

Pars 64, Dies octavus Novembris, p. 765 ff.
passio SS.Quattuor Coronatorum, auctore Porphyrio.

1 Ventum est quodam die, imperante Diocletiano, ut simulacrum Solis cum quadriga ex lapide raso artifices cum omni argumento currum, equos vel omnia ex uno lapide sculptirent.

4 Nam quem tu dicis deum, quare non cognoscis quia ex nostris manibus sculptitur? Nescis quia et Solem, quem nos per sculptura artis fecimus, et ipsud nihil est?

6 Tum dixit (Simplicius) ad Simpronianum: Adiuro te per deum Solem ut dicas mihi, quis est iste deus qui omnia creavit ....

18 Continuo iussit Lampadius tribunus ...: adorate deum Solem, ut destruatis consilium philosophorum.... .

18 ... Iratus Diocletianus augustus dixit: Per Solem, quod si non sacrificaverint deo Soli secundum morem antiquum, et monitis non oboedierint, diversis et exquisitis eos tormentis consumam.

19 Mox Lampadius iussit ut alia die in eodem loco ante templum Solis sisterent.

19 ... ut sacrificetis deo Soli et antiquis numinibus detis honorem.

19 Lampadius dixit: Et quae lux clara quam dei Solis?

19 (Diocletianus): Amodo si non consenserint et sacrificaverint deo Soli, verberibus scorpionum eos adflige ....

20 Post dies vero quinque iterum sedit (Lampadius) in eodem loco ante templum Solis ... dicens: Sacrificate deo Soli.

Pars 64, Dies octavus Novembris, p. 780 ff.
Passio SS. Quattuor Coronatorum, auctore Petro.

2 ... Quamquam divinitas sacrorum numinum una aedemque sit, et communia nobis beneficia praestent, tamen quia scimus apud

omnipotentiam Iovis quosdam gloria et dignitate pollere, sicut est deus Sol, praecipimus ut omni diligentia illius figuram in curru sedentem mirifice construere studeatis, scientes procul dubio quoniam quanto diligenti conanime illum venerari curamus, tanto nos ille suo iuvamine apud caelicolum regem fovere et gubernare dignabitur. ... Hanc itaque culturam Solis ethnica stultitia ideo illum in curru residentem fingebant, quia Eliam prophetam olim in curru igneo ad caelum ascendisse legerant vel audierant.

7 .... Illi vero praeceptis eius faventes, omnia mirabiliter perfecerunt et Caesari detulerunt, praeter Asclepii statuam, intelligentes quod templum illi vellet construere, sicut simulacrum Solis, ad christocolarum subsannationem.

9 Igitur Lampadius tribunus iussit consilium praeparari in eodem loco ante Solis templum et praefatos Christi milites cum philosophis simul adduci.... Olim figuram Solis, o iudex, Caesare praecipiente, manibus nostris de lapide praecidimus et operati sumus; ....

10 Mox praefatus iudex Lampadius iussit eos alia die ante templum Solis astare, et dixit: "Quod iussit sacratissimus imperator iam vobis optimo cognitum est, scilicet ut divis numinibus sacrificia offeratis et quam maxime deo Soli". .... Et quis tam claram lucem praebere valet, quemadmodum deus Sol, qui in oriente oriens statim in occidente apparet, et totum mundum sua irradiat claritate.

11 Si vultis esse gloriosi inter amicos sacri imperii, sicut jam praediximus, sacrificate deo Soli; sin autem, omne genus hoc tormentorum in corpore vestro experietur.

BREVIARIUM ROMANUM (*ed.* Romae et Vindobonae, 1919)

Pars aestiva, p. 704.

Romae, anno 250 A.D.

Qui (Abdon et Sennen Persae) cum in Urbe ad simulacra attracti essent, ea detestati conspuerunt. Quam ob rem ursis ac leonibus objecti sunt: quos ferae non audebant attingere. Demum gladiis trucidati, colligatis pedibus tracti sunt ante Solis simulacrum: quorum corpora clam inde asportata, Quirinus diaconus sepelivit in suis aedibus.

MARTYROLOGIUM ROMANUM, 8a Novembris:

Romae, via Lavicana, tertio ab Urbe milliario, passio sanctorum martyrum Claudii, Nicostrati, Symphoriani, Castorii et Simplicii, qui primo in carcerem missi, deinde scorpionibus gravissime caesi, cum a fide Christi mutare non possent, jussi sunt a Diocletiano in fluvium praecipites dari. Item via Lavicana, natalis sanctorum quattuor Coronatorum fratrum, Severi, Severiani, Carpophori et Victorini, qui sub eodem tempore ictibus plumbarum usque ad mortem ceasi sunt .....

BREVIARIUM ROMANUM, *pars autumnalis*, p. 664.

Qui eodem imperatore passi erant: quod, cum essent summi sculptores, nullo modo adduci potuerant ut idolorum statuas facerent; et ad Solis simulacrum ducti, numquam comissuros se dixerunt, ut adorarent opera manuum hominum. Quamobrem in carcerem conjecti, cum ibi multos dies in eadem proposito perstitissent, primum scorpionibus caesi, deinde vivi plumbeis loculis inclusi in flumen dejiciuntur. Extat in Urbe ecclesia sub nomine sanctorum Quattuor Coronatorum ..... .

PASSIO SANCTORUM ABDONIS ET SENIS MARTYRUM (*ed.* Mobritius I, 20) rep. I. Lugli, *Fontes* III, 324.

n° 146 Decius autem iratus iussit sibi editionem in amphitheatro parari. Et factum est. Cum venissent (Abdon et Senen) ad amphitheatrum, voluit Decius introire ... Et furore repletus (Valerianus) deduxit eos ante simulacrum Solis iuxta amphitheatrum.

PASSIO SANCTI STEPHANI PAPAE ET MARTYRIS (*ed.* Mobritius II, 498) rep. I. Lugli, *Fontes* III, 324.

n° 147 Relicta autem sunt corpora (martyrum) post triumphum ante simulacrum Solis iuxta amphitheatrum.

AMBROSIUS MACROBIUS THEODOSIUS (end of 4th, beginning of 5th century A.D.)

SATURNALIA, (*ed.* F. Eyssenhardt, Leipzig, 1893; *ed.* H. Bornecque, Paris, 1937)

I, 17, 1 Hoc equidem mecum multum ac frequenter agitavi quid sit quod Solem modo Apollinem, modo Liberum, modo sub

aliarum appellationum varietate veneremur. Et quia sacrorum omnium praesulem esse te, Vetti Praetextate, divina voluerunt, perge, quaeso, rationem mihi tantae sub uno nomine in nominibus diversitatis aperire.

I, 17, 2 .... Nam quod omnes paene deos, dumtaxat qui sub caelo sunt, ad Solem referunt, non vana superstitio, sed ratio divina commendat.

I, 17, 3 Si enim Sol, ut veteribus placuit, dux et moderator est luminum reliquorum et solus stellis errantibus praestat, ipsarum vero stellarum cursus ordinem rerum humanarum, ut quibusdam videtur, pro potestate disponunt, ut Plotino constat placuisse, significant, necesse est ut Solem, qui moderatur nostra moderantes, omnium quae circa nos geruntur fateamur auctorem.

I, 17, 4 .... ita diversae virtutes Solis nomina dis dederunt. Unde ἕν τὸ πᾶν sapientum principes prodiderunt.

I, 17, 66 Hieropolitani praeterea, qui sunt gentis Assyriorum, omnes Solis effectus atque virtutes ad unius simulacri barbati speciem redigunt eumque Apollinem appellant.

I, 18, 7 Sed licet illo prius asserto eundem esse Apollinem ac Solem, edoctoque postea ipsum Liberum patrem qui Apollo est, nulla ex his dubitatio sit Solem ac Liberum patrem ejusdem numinis habendum, absolute tamen hoc argumentis liquidioribus adstruetur.

LEO MAGNUS (5th century A.D.)

SERMONES, *ed.* Migne, 1845

XXI, 6 Quibus hac dies (25th of dec.) non tam de nativitate Christi quam de novi, ut dicunt Solis ortu honorabilis videtur.

FLAVIUS MAGNUS AURELIUS CASSIODORUS (ca. 487-583, A.D.)

CHRONICA (*ed.* Mommsen, *MGH*; I. Lugli, *Fontes* I, 204, n° 10)

(anno p.C. 275): His (Aureliano II et Marcello) consulibus Aurelianus templum Soli aedificavit, Romam firmioribus muris vallat.

IOANNIS ZONARAE (12th. century A.D.)

EPITOME HISTORIARUM (*ed.* L. Dindorfius, III, Leipzig 1870)

XII, 14, B, C Καὶ θεὸν δέ τινα ξενικόν εἰς τήν Ῥώμην εἰσήνεγκεν Ἐλεαγάβαλον καλούμενον, καὶ τοῦ Διός αὐτὸν προετίμησεν· ὅθεν κἀκεῖνος ἐπωνομάσθη Ἐλεαγάβαλος . . . . Ἔγημε δὲ πρός ταῖς ἄλλαις καὶ ἱερωμένην τῇ Ἑστίᾳ παρθένον, ἀσεβήσας περὶ τὰ πάτρια ἀναιδέστατα. Καὶ ἔλεγε διὰ τοῦτο γῆμαι τήν τῆς Ἑστίας ἱερείαν, ἵν' ἐξ ἐκείνου ἀρχιερέως ὄντος τοῦ Ἐλεαγαβάλου καὶ τῆς ἱερείας παῖδες γένωνται θεοπρεπεῖς. Οὐ μόνον δὲ βαρβαρικὰς ᾠδας ἅμα τῇ μητρὶ καὶ τῇ τήθῃ τῷ ξένῳ θεῷ ᾖδε, καὶ ἀπορρήτους προσῆγε θυσίας, παῖδας σφαγιάζων καὶ γοητεύμασι χρώμενος καί περιάπτοις μυρίοις ἑκάστοτε, ἀλλὰ καὶ γυναῖκα τῷ θεῷ αὐτοῦ ἐκείνῳ ἐμνήστευσεν ὡς καὶ παίδων δεομένῳ, καὶ τήν γυναῖκα ἐς τὸ παλάτιον καθιδρύσατο, καὶ ἕδνα αὐτῇ ἐκ τῶν ὑπηκόων ἐπράξατο.

CHAPTER II

THE SUN CULT UP TO THE FIRST CENTURY OF THE EMPIRE

During Rome's earliest centuries, her population was made up entirely of sturdy farmers whose public and family life was centred on their agricultural pursuits, a pattern which was to remain characteristic of the Romans for a long time to come.

Religion often provides the best key to the nature and fundamental traits of a people, and in religious matters the early Romans were highly conservative. The *Di Indigites*, the autochthonous deities, more than satisfied the religious needs of the rather unimaginative Roman. The quintet of the most important early gods, Janus, Jupiter, Mars, Quirinus and Vesta, took care of all eventualities, and each of these gods had a group of adherents, each of whom had a more or less clearly defined role to fulfil.

In addition to these principal gods and their subsidiaries, the early Romans also worshipped another series of deities of lesser rank having special functions related to agriculture, fertility, safety, honesty, and so on. A separate but no less important place was occupied by the Penates, Lares and Genii who, together with Vesta, were worshipped with special rites, particularly in the intimacy of the family circle.

In this rather disparate complex of deities and deified beings, a minor but independent place was taken by Sol, the sun god, protector of fertility, health and honesty.

From its earliest times, Rome must have known and worshipped a sun deity. Because there is so little concrete evidence for a cult of Sol until after the first emperors, some authors, including Wissowa and Richter, have felt justified in concluding that no autochthonous sun god had ever existed. Even today, the origin of this deity remains controversial. Von Domaszewski was of the opinion that the worship of Sol was one of the oldest components of the Roman religion [1]. Wissowa, on the other hand,

[1] A. Von Domaszewski, *Abhandlungen zur Römischen Religion*, 1909, p. 173.

places Sol, and Luna as well, among the *Di novensides* of Greek origin [1].

In our opinion Von Domaszewski's view is the correct one. Once the arguments for and against an autochthonous sun cult in Rome have been weighed, it can only be concluded that the Romans worshipped and prayed to Sol as one of their *Di indigites*. It is important in this connection to consider the meaning and importance of the epithet. There is no difficulty in placing the worship of the sun god in the earliest times, when it slowly took on a natural pattern and form determined by observation of the solar cycle. Altheim has repeatedly demonstrated, particularly in the first volume of his *Italien und Rom*, that this was certainly the case for most of the groups that inhabited the Italian peninsula. Although it is the sun chariot and the solar disc that are most often found on rocks and in caves, the first traces of an anthropomorphic representation of the sun deity have also been found there. In Rome itself we find indications of a cultic worship of *Sol Indiges* as early as the time of the oldest calendar, in which the close relationship between Jupiter and Sol is clear. This is certainly true of the period following the *Septimontium*, in which the northernmost settlement of the Sabines was incorporated into the city, and it is this time from which the oldiest calendar dates [2]. When mention is made of *Sol Indiges*, therefore, a sun god is meant who was worshipped in Rome as early as the fourth century B.C.

Apart from this calendar, the oldest known evidence for formal worship of the sun god is provided by the representation on a Roman *bigatus* dating from the Second Punic War [3]. The figure of Sol in a chariot drawn by four horses, as he was later usually portrayed, is found on a *denarius* of the *gens* Manlia struck in 135 B.C.[4].

[1] G. Wissowa, *Religion und Kultus der Römer*, Munich, 1912², p. 315: "Nur im Ermangelung eines besser zu begründenden Platzes lasse ich hier anhangsweise den Kult von Sol and Luna folgen, dessen Alter und Herkunft auch nur mit annähender Sicherheit zu bestimmen wir zur Zeit ausserstande sind".

[2] F. Altheim, *Italien und Rom*, Amsterdam-Leipzig 1941, II, pp. 24-25.

[3] A. Klügmann, *Die Typen der ältesten römischen Bigati* in *Zeitschrift für Numismatik*, V (1878), pp. 62 f.

[4] J. Babelon, *Monnaies consulaires*, II, p. 175, n° 1.

Varro tells us that the Romans assigned a place among their gods to Sol and Luna [1]. This goddess was usually invoked immediately after Jupiter and Tellus, together with the sun god, who according to tradition had been introduced by the Sabine Titus Tatius [2]. This is perhaps a reminiscence of Rome's unification. Tacitus also states that Luna and Sol had an autochthonous, early-Italian character for the Romans [3].

The tradition indeed makes no reference to a sun god, but in the *Fasti* of Philocalus [4], a calendar dating from the time of Augustus but before 27 B.C., there is a very important indication for the date of the 9th of August: *Soli indigiti in colle Quirinali.* This provides conclusive evidence that an autochthonous Sol was meant here. Nevertheless, Wissowa [5] and Richter [6] contest the meaning of *indigiti* as it conflicts with their view that Sol was a deity taken over from the Greeks. According to Wissowa, *indigiti* can not have here the same meaning as in the ancient sacred law, because this expression could only have been intended to distinguish the sun cult as a native, well-established worship from the rising and increasingly influential Eastern sun cults. But *indiges* was never used in this sense [7]. Furthermore, there was no great awareness yet under the principate that a distinction had to be made between the sun god revered in Rome from ancient times and the god whose cult was centred in the East [8]. (This argument is of course valid only for the first few centuries of the Empire.)

During the last decades of the Republic there was increasing interest in the forms of religion that had receded into the background or been forgotten. As a result, the cult of Sol became more and more important, and the figure of the sun god appeared on coins more

[1] Varro, *De re rustica*, I, I, 5.
[2] Varro, *De Lingua latina*, V, 74.
[3] Tacitus, *Annales*, XV, 41; XV, 74.
[4] *CIL* I, 2, p. 324 or Fasti of Amiternum, CIL IX, 4192.
[5] G. Wissowa, *op. cit.*, pp. 315 f.
[6] F. Richter, *Sol* in Roscher, IV, p. 1140.
[7] C. Koch, *Gestirnverehrung im alten Italien. Sol Indiges und der Kreis der Di Indigites* in *Frankfurter Studien zur Religion und Kultur der Antike*, 1933, pp. 78-84; H. Wagenvoort, *Imperium*, Amsterdam 1941, pp. 73-102; G. K. Galinsky, *Sol and the Carmen saeculare* in *Latomus* XXVI, 3 (1967), 619-633.
[8] C. Koch, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

often than ever. Before Augustus, Anthony gave greater prominence to the worship of Sol by portraying the sun god on his coins [1], the representation on one dating from 43 B.C. being considered a precursor of the later sun syncretism [2]. On this coin the sun god is shown standing naked with an aureole and the wings of Victory; he faces the left and has his right foot on a globe. In his right hand he holds the *caduceus*, in his left the horn of plenty. On his back hang the bow and quiver of Apollo. The shield of Mars stands behind him; on a truncated cone in front of him an eagle, the bird of Jupiter and Sol, spreads his wings. The whole represents the concentration of all divine power in the sun god.

This tendency became even more pronounced under Augustus, who made it the very basis of his religious policy. True to the republican tradition he fought *superstitio* and distrusted the Eastern cults. Nevertheless by favouring the cult of Apollo he laid the basis for the extension of the theology of the sun a few centuries later [3].

When, after the conquest of Egypt, Augustus sent two obelisks to Rome to be erected in the Circus Maximus [4] and on the Field of Mars [5], and dedicated them to Sol, the ceremonies undoubtedly concerned the autochthonous sun god. Led by his convictions, Augustus was determined first and foremost to give new lustre to the ancient cults of the Roman people and if necessary to rescue them from oblivion. In doing so he deliberately drove the most Eastern ceremonies outside the *pomerium* [6]. It is therefore impossible to consider an Eastern sun god in this connection, and it

[1] A. Piganiol, *Histoire de Rome*, Paris 1954[4], p. 239; Cesano, *Boll. dell'Assoc. Archeol. Romana* (1912) p. 231.

[2] H. Cohen, *Description historique des monnaies frappées sous l'empire romain*, t. I, p. 44, n° 73.

[3] A. Piganiol, *op. cit.*, p. 229: "Fidèle à la tradition républicaine, il combat la *superstitio*, ... se méfie des cultes orientaux. Mais il favorise le culte d'Apollon et il est ainsi l'initiateur de cette théologie solaire, qui devait plus tard s'opposer à la théologie chrétienne. Auguste donne le premier rang aux dieux de la lumière".

[4] *CIL* VI, 701: *Imp(erator) Caesar Divi f(ilius) Augustus .... Aegypto in potestatem populi Romani redacta, Soli donum dedit.*

[5] *CIL* IV, 702, with the same reading.

[6] L. Homo, *Histoire Romaine*, t. III, Le Haut Empire in *Histoire Générale*, sous la direction de G. Glotz, Paris 1933, p. 159.

was certainly the autochthonous Sol to whom Augustus dedicated these obelisks. If the religious policies of Augustus are considered from this standpoint, it is evident that these expressions of gratitude were intended for the ancient Roman sun god. Egypt, the country with a centuries-old worship of the sun god, where the gods of light and of the heavens were held in the deepest reverence, had been brought under the power of the Roman people: *Aegypto in potestatem populi romani redacta*! No single deity of the Roman pantheon could more rightfully claim this glorious victory than the ancient Roman Sol, since it was achieved through his special intervention and protection. The two obelisks which were symbols of the sun god in Egypt, constitute additional support for this interpretation. In Rome, Augustus would have had difficulty in finding other places for them that would have conveyed the purposes of the dedication more clearly. The Circus Maximus had since ancient times been dedicated to *Sol Indiges*, who had placed it under his special protection. The *quadrigae*, whose epigraphic and numismatic representations usually refer to the sun god, were, as Tertullian tells us, specially protected by Sol, just as the *bigae* were entrusted to Luna [1]. The obelisk with the dedication to Sol was therefore a fitting addition to the Circus Maximus.

Egypt was brought under the rule of the Roman people thanks to the leadership of Augustus and the strength of his weapons. Consequently, there could be no better location for the second obelisk than the Field of Mars, where everything recalled heroic feats of arms.

[1] Tertullianus, *De Spectaculis*, 9, 3 (*ed.* Boulanger, Paris 1933): *De iugo vero quadrigas Soli, bigas Lunae sanxerunt.* This is the reading handed down in manuscripts, but with the additions of Klussmann and Keubler from Isidorus, *Etymol.* 18, 36, 1, Boulanger gives the text as follows: *Seiugas vero Iovi, quadrigas Soli, trigas dis inferis, bigas Lunae sanxerunt.* Since in what follows (par. 3-5, Boulanger) only the invention of the *quadrigae* is mentioned, we belief that the manuscript text is not defective and that the citation in Isidore would more probably have been interpolated if it had been based on a second edition of the work, in which what follows had also been stated differently. *Anthologia Latina* I, 197, 17; this is also true in the period of the Empire, see the representations on the monuments, f.i. the lead plaques, found in Pannonia, dating from the first half of the third century A.D. (D. Tudor, *Corpus monumentum religionis Equitum Danuvinorum*, I, Leiden 1969, 74, 127; 76, 132; 77, 133; 79, 135).

It is certain that a temple on the Quirinal and another in the Circus Maximus were dedicated to the Roman sun god [1], since Quintilian says (I, 7, 12): *in pulvinari Solis, qui colitur juxta aedem Quirini, VESPERUG scriptum est, quod vesperuginem accipimus.*

The reading *pulvinari* suggests that the cult was a Greek importation, since *pulvinar* and *lectisternium* originally referred to the *graecus ritus* [2]. But *pulvinar* and *lectisternium* were also used in purely Roman religious ceremonies that did not employ the *graecus ritus*, for instance those devoted to Jupiter, Minerva and others, as early as the last period of the Republic. This view is shared by Wissowa [3].

The oldest coins of the Republic bearing the portrait of the sun god or his companion Luna, are said to be of Greek design and manufacture [4]. This led Wissowa to conclude that Sol and Luna were introduced from Greece [5]. But in the Greek pantheon only a small, unimportant place was reserved for the god Helios, in comparison with the other gods, and only a few — and it is striking just how few—epigraphic texts are devoted to him [6]. It is true that the colossal figure of the sun god standing in a racing chariot drawn by four horses, which was erected at Rhodes, was made by

[1] Tacitus, *Annales*, XV, 74; Tertullianus, *De Spectaculis*, 8, 1-2: *Ut et de locis, secundum propositum exsequar, circus Soli principaliter consecratur. Cuius aedis medio spatio et effigies de fastigio aedis emicat, quod non putaverunt sub tecto consecrandum quem in aperto habent.* Cf. Lucianus, *De Syria dea*, 34; M. Santangelo, *Il Quirinale nell'Antichità classica* (*Atti Pont. Acc. Rom. Arch. S.* III vol. V, 2), Città del Vaticano 1941; G. Lugli, *Fontes ad topographiam veteris urbis Romae pertinentes, I-V*, Rome 1952-1960.

[2] C. Koch, *op. cit.*, pp. 31-32.

[3] G. Wissowa, *op. cit.*, p. 422.

[4] J. Babelon, *Monnaies de la République*, I, p. 20, n° 21; E. A. Sydenham, *The Roman Republic Coinage*, London 1952; H. A. Grueber, *Coins of the Roman Republic in the British Museum*, London 1910, II, p. 137, n° 125 (now in the Strozzi-collection, an *uncia*, younger than 269 B.C.).

[5] G. Wissowa, *op, cit.*, p. 261, n° 8.

[6] H. Sichtermann, *Helios* in *Enciclopedia dell'Arte antica classica e orientale*, III, Roma 1960, p. 11-1142; K. Schauenburg, *Helios. Archäologische-Mythologische Studien über den antiken Sonnengott*, Berlin 1955; G. Kleiner, *Helios und Sol* in *Charites*, 1957, p. 101 ff.; R. Cagnat, *Inscriptiones Graecae*, n° 350; CIG XIV, 1108c; CIG XIV, 2184: "Αγαλμα εἰμι 'Ηλίου; CIG XIV, 2414[28]; CIG XIV, 2414[29]; CIG V, 1179: ... Μάρ(κον) Αὐρ(ήλιον) Καλοκλέα... τὸν ἱερέα τῶν ἐπιφανεστάτων θεῶν Διὸς Βουλαίου καὶ 'Ηλίου καὶ Σελήνης...."; R. Cagnat, *op. cit.*, 1322.

Lysippos [1]. (This statue was the precursor of the Colossus of Rhodes, made by Chares of Lindos [2], the figure of the sun god Helios, that was later placed at the entrance to the harbour). And Pausanias' description of Greece does indeed contain many references to centres in which Helios was especially revered [3]. But despite the facts it may certainly be concluded that the hypothesis that the cult of Sol at Rome had a Greek origin is not very probable.

Besides the temple on the Quirinal, Rome had in the Circus Maximus another dedicated to Sol Indiges, and this temple even carried the figure of the sun god in this chariot. This chariot is hardly surprising in view of the special protection given by Sol to the *quadrigae*. An obelisk found in Rome and now in the Capitoline Museum bears the figure of a Roman soldier with his spear, shield (*clipeus*), and carries an inscription reading:

... καὶ πρῶτον στρεφθεὶς στάδιν καὶ αὐτός δε δίαυλον Ἡελίου τε δρομὸν καὶ Μήνης τε Σελήνης ἄθλα τέλεσας [4].

This again demonstrates the relationship between the sun god and the games held in the Circus Maximus. In reviewing the deities worshipped in the Circus, Tertullian says [5]: *Circus Soli principaliter consecratur*, and of the temple: *aedes* (*Solis*) *in medio spatio* (*circi*) *et effigies de fastigio emicat*; and in Tacitus we find the phrase: *vetus aedes apud circum* [6]. As far as *apud* is concerned, there is an apparent contradiction, but it is sufficient to recall that there are other cases in which Tacitus uses this word with the meaning of *in* [7]. The temple of the sun god may therefore be considered to have been situated within the Circus Maximus, and we cannot accept Hülsen's argument [8] that the temple was originally built

[1] Ch. Picard, *Manuel d'archéologie grecque*, Paris 1963, IV, p. 518- 534.

[2] L. Laurenzi, *Colosso di Rodi* in *Enciclopedia dell'arte classica e orientale*, Roma 1959, II, p. 773-774; H. Maryon, *Chares of Lindos* in *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, LXXVI, 1956, p. 68 ff.

[3] Pausanias, *Descriptio Graeciae*, I, 4, 1; II, 1, 1, ;II, 1, 6; II, 11, 1; II, 18, 3; II, 34, 10; III, 20, 4; V, 25, 9; VIII, 9, 4.

[4] *CIG* XIV, 1108c; W. Helbig, *Führer durch die öffentlichen Sammlungen klassischen Altertümer in Rom*, II, Tübingen 1966.

[5] Tertullianus, *De Spectaculis*, 8.

[6] Tacitus, *Annales*, XV, 74.

[7] Tacitus, *Annales*, I, 5: ... *apud urbem Nolam*; *ibid.*, I, 64: ... *apud paludes* ...; *ibid.*, XV, 32.

[8] C. Hülsen, *Diss. d. Pont. Acad. Rom.*, 1896, p. 267.

outside the circus and was only later included in its confines when the circus was enlarged. This sun god was therefore indeed *indiges*, autocthonous. The text in the Augustinian calender for the 9th of August is then quite clear: *Soli indigiti in colle Quirinali.*

The anniversary of the foundation of the temple on the Quirinal fell on the 9th of August and that of the temple of the sun in the Circus Maximus was on the 28th of August [1].

The simple assumption that this sun god was borrowed from the Greek pantheon, i.e. was a Greek importation, could only be true for the period after 217 A.D., since there can be no question of a Greek cult at Rome *intra pomoerium* before that date. The most probable as well as the most logical solution is that the sun god worshipped at Rome in the Circus Maximus and on the Quirinal was an autochthonous Sol, and even the hypothesis that he reached Rome via Etruria or Magna Graecia is superfluous.

This conclusion follows from the fact that during Rome's first centuries her inhabitants were rugged farmers who put all their energy into cultivating the soil. Among the early Romans, just as in other primitive societies, the sun's role in religious and ritual ceremonies was an important one, for the special responsibility of the sun god is to provide for the fertility of the fields.

When mention is made of the ancient Sol Indiges, Luna is almost always mentioned immediately after him. To Luna, as companion of the sun god, was assigned the special protection of the *bigae* in the circus. The 28th of August was also dedicated to her in this capacity [2]. The text of an inscription found at Ostia clearly indicates that one priest served both: *Lucius Aemilius Iulianus, sacerdos Solis et Lunae* [3]. There are many inscriptions concerning Sol and Luna [4]. A freedman of Nero's dedicated an *ara marmorea* to Sol and Luna showing the sun god with a sacrificial bowl and pitcher [5]. This too should undoubtedly be connected with the autochthonous Sol, who was usually associated with Luna.

[1] *CIL* I², p. 327: *V KAL SEPT, Solis et Lunae; c(ircenses)m(issus)* XXIV.
[2] *CIL* I², p. 327.
[3] *CIL* XIV, 4089⁷; Meiggs, *Ostia*, p. 375, note 5.
[4] *CIL* V, 3917: *Quintus Serorius Festus, flamen, Soli et Lunae*; *CIG* V, 1179.
[5] *CIL* VI, 3719: *Eumolpus, Caesaris libertus, ... et Claudia Pallas, f(ilia), Soli et Lunae donum posuerunt.*

Evidence for our hypothesis is also provided by two dedications to Sol and Luna by the *flamen* Q. Sertorius Festus, which were found in almost the same place at Arusnates in the Italian regio X of Venetia [1]. In the year 86 A.D., during the reign of the Emperor Domitian, the freedman Q. Julius Felix dedicated a marble altar to Sol Divinus in his own name and that of his wife, Julia Romana, for some reason not mentioned in the inscription. The name of the sun god occurs between those of Jupiter Optimus Maximus and of Genius, which clearly indicates that the sun god was considered the equal of two specifically Roman deities[2]. This *ara marmorea* was found at Rome, indicating that the sun god was not unknown there, whatever his true origin may have been.

M. Scanianus Zosa dedicated an altar to Sol and Luna, showing the figures of Sol, Luna and Silvanus [3]. The sun god here is unquestionably the ancient autochthonous Sol of the Romans, as usual associated with the goddess Luna. The presence of the truly Roman gods Silvanus and Genius strongly suggests that the altar, which was placed in Rome, dates at the latest from the first century of the Empire.

A *basis marmorea* found at Rome in the lower city and dating from the year 100 A.D., i.e. during the reign of Trajan [4], also bears a dedication by a prominent man, T. Claudius Pollio, to the Roman deities Sol, Luna and Diana. Here once more the autochthonous sun god is meant, which indicates that at that time the Sol cult had not yet completely disappeared and been forgotten in Rome.

On the 25th of May in A.D. 102, during the second consulate of C. Julius Ursus Servianus and L. Licinius Sura, a *tabula marmorea* was erected to commemorate the fact that one Julius Anicetus had borne the costs of the renovation of a gallery of the Temple of the Sun [5]. At the time, therefore, there was still a site for the cult of the autochthonous Sol; clearly, there can have been no question of religious ceremonies belonging to an Eastern cult or sun god.

[1] *CIL* V, 3917 and 3918.
[2] *CIL* VI, 398.
[3] *CIL* VI, 705.
[4] *CIL* VI, 3720.
[5] *CIL* VI, 31034: *Iulius Anicetus, voto suscepto ... primam porticum templi Solis ... sua pecunia a solo restituit...*; *CIL* VI, 709.

Nevertheless some slight influence on the Roman soldiers in the East, for instance, had already been possible [1].

Outside Rome and Italy, the traces of an ancient Sol cult are even less frequent. One instance has been found in Germania, in which Sol is still connected with Luna [2].

In Hispania Lusitania, the ancient worship of Sol and Luna seems to have flourished to an unusual degree [3] and even to have persisted for a time during the Empire, when syncretism had become dominant [4]. The importance of the cult of the sun there can be inferred from the fact that Cestius Acidius Perennis, the *legatus Augusti propraetore* of the *provincia* Lusitania performed the dedication himself. The promontory north of Olisippo in Lusitania was called *promontorium Solis et Lunae* [5].

However, because of the scanty and rather unimpressive evidence, we must conclude that during this period the sun god did not play a predominant part in Roman religion. He is only mentioned occasionally, and epigraphic material is rare.

Nonetheless, it is known that the worship of Sol was maintained by the *gens Aurelia* [6], and was concentrated on the Quirinal [7]. The god was typified as the all-knowing and as the revealer of hidden and secret things. When the conspiracy against Nero was discovered, the sun god was considered to have saved the emperor [8]. In A.D. 75, Vespasian dedicated a gigantic statue of the sun god, and Nero is reported to have ordered a representation of the god from the sculptor Zenodoros [9].

But when, starting in the second century A.D., the Eastern sun worship begins to influence Rome and the rest of the Empire, the rare indications bearing witness to an ancient cult of Sol disappear [10].

[1] Tacitus, *Historiae*, III, 24.
[2] *Corpus Inscriptionum Rhenarum*, 1838.
[3] *CIL* II, 258.
[4] *CIL* II, 259, dating from the rule of Emperor Septimius Severus.
[5] *CIL* II, 258.
[6] C. Koch, *op. cit.*, pp. 33-41.
[7] C. Koch, *op. cit.*, p. 109.
[8] Tacitus, *Annales*, XV, 74.
[9] C. Koch, *op. cit.*, p. 109; Ch. Picard, *op. cit.*, IV, pp. 518-534.
[10] A. von Domaszewski (*Abhandlungen zur römischen Religion*, p. 173) is also of the opinion that the cult of Sol belongs to the oldest components of the

The legionaries were responsible for enlarging the numbers of the devotees of the sun-cults, particularly Mithraism; and the influence of *Sol Invictus Elagabal*, the most important Syrian sun god, must also in turn have contributed greatly to the prominence of sun worship from the beginning of the third century A.D. At this time a theology had developed that recognized in the visible source of light and warmth the all-embracing deity to whom the other gods were related as the rays of light to their source. In this theology almost all the gods were derived from the sun god.

These solar deities did not suddenly penetrate the Roman pantheon in the second century. They had been known for some time especially to the soldiers who had been in Syria or Persia with their legions. Tacitus reports, for instance, that the Roman soldiers saluted the rising sun in the manner of the Syrians during the battle of Bedriacum in A.D. 69 [1].

The cult of the Syrian *Sol Invictus* was therefore sufficiently well known to acquire zealous adherents far beyond its original borders. This of course required favourable circumstances, and these were realized when the emperors themselves came into contact in Syria with the new spirit possessing the followers of Sol Invictus Elagabal, the Unconquerable God of the Sun.

In the second century A.D. the Eastern sun gods occupied an unchallenged position. Their great power is significantly and officially expressed in the name, *Sol Invictus* or *Deus Invictus*, the sun god who, although he seems each evening to be forced to submit to the powers of darkness, reappears each morning as the eternal victor. The emperors, who more and more came to consider them-

Roman religion. As everywhere else, at Rome the rising sun was greeted each morning (cf. the Epigram of Q. Lutatius Catulus in Cicero, *De Natura deorum*, I, 28, 79:

Constiteram exorientem Auroram forte salutans
cum subito a laeva Roscius exoritur ...)

The prayer had to be spoken while facing the East: *ad ortus, ad orientem*..., cf. F. J. Dölger, "*Sol Salutis*" in *Liturgische Forschungen*, 4/5, 1925, p. 39; Servius, *Ad Aen.*, XII, 172. Furthermore, many traces of sun worship can be found in the theories of divination and augury: cf. C. Koch, *op. cit.*, pp. 14 and 23.

[1] Tacitus, *Historiae*, III, 24: *Undique clamor et orientem Solem* (*ita in Suria mos est*) *tertiani salutavere.*

selves as Eastern despots, saw in this vision of the indestructible and ever-victorious sun god a symbol of their power.

The worship of *Sol Invictus*, the sun god, started to increase in the second century not only because more attention was given to the benefits bestowed by the sun each day or the great role played by the sun in the cosmic system, but also because religious ceremonies served certain political tendencies. The worship of the sun was not solely based on philosophical considerations; it was also grounded on the dogma of the Eastern priestly astronomers. For them the sun was Βασιλεὺς Ἥλιος, a king surrounded by his servants who regulated the course of the celestial bodies. The sun was the heart of the universe, the καρδία τοῦ κόσμου, which bestowed all life [1]. Literary and romantic fictions contributed to the spread of this theological theory [2], and the political ends of the empire were served by these theological concepts. The emperors came to see themselves as the *comites* of the sun god, and had themselves worshipped as such. For them, *Sol Invictus* became the *Conservator*. They also insisted on the reality of their descent from the sun god, with the result that a public sun cult was established.

The literary propaganda, the preaching, and the diffusion of the teachings by the Eastern priests who had attracted the attention of the Romans, the activity of the propagators of these philosophical systems, but above all the opportunistic support of the emperors, guaranteed the incontestible supremacy of the cult of *Sol Invictus*.

[1] F. Cumont, *Les Mystères de Mithra*, Brussels, 1913; M. J. Vermaseren, *Mithras. De geheimzinnige god*, Amsterdam 1959, p. 27.

[2] Heliodoros, a priest of Sol Invictus Elagabal at Emesa, in his *Aethiopicorum libri decem*; F. Altheim, *Der Unbesiegte Gott*, p. 67; F. Altheim, *Helios und Heliodoros von Emesa*, in *Albae Vigilae*, XII 1942.

CHAPTER III

THE EASTERN RELIGIONS: THEIR DISTRIBUTION AND ADHERENTS [1]

The Romans were apparently not content with their many and disparate deities, their heroes, *genii*, and later—in the time of the Empire—deified emperors, because they also borrowed many gods for whom places of worship were ultimately provided in Rome itself.

The religions of the provinces were forced to give way to the Roman religion, except for those of the East, which were able to maintain themselves and expand until they attained dominance even in the capital of the Empire [2]. The gradual penetration which had started in the first century became a headlong flood in the third century, and the East came to prevail in religious matters. How did such an extreme influence become possible?

The Roman conquests had exposed the legionaries to the manners and customs, ideas and religious convictions, of the peoples they had successfully attacked or countries in which they had been quartered. Increasing commerce with the East had intensified traffic, and the merchants who bought or sold at distant markets brought back to Rome not only Eastern products but also strange religious ideas and dogmas.

Many of the legionaries had encountered the principal cult of Syria, that of *Sol Invictus Elagabal*, whose most important religious centre was Emesa, because the greatest concentrations of troops in the East occurred in Syria, and the governor, *legatus Augusti pro-praetore*, not only had administrative and military authority over Syria but was also military commander of the East.

[1] J. Réville, *La Religion à Rome sous les Sévères*, Paris 1907²; F. Cumont, *Les religions orientales dans le paganisme romain*, Paris 1929⁴; J. Gagé, *Basiléia, les Césars, les rois d'Orient et les mages*, Paris 1968; J. Ferguson, *The Religions of the Roman Empire*, London 1970.

[2] M. Platnauer, *Life and Reign of the Emperor L. Septimius Severus*, Oxford 1918; F. Altheim, *La Religion romaine antique*, Paris 1955; J. Babelon, *Impératrices Syriennes*, Paris 1957.

In the second century many Syrian emigrants served as domestics in Rome and other parts of Italy; Syrian merchants settled in Rome and other cities of the Empire [1], and continued to maintain their faith and religious rites wherever they were or in whatever milieu they found themselves [2]. Everywhere they organized their national cults as votaries of *Sol Invictus Elagabal*, *Jupiter Dolichenus* or *Jupiter Heliopolitanus*, in places where the original worshippers of Mithras were usually *Asiatici* of lower station [3].

Workmen, slaves or *coloni* who had been brought from their homeland to the Roman provinces remained true to their national cults, especially the many who stayed in Dacia and gave rise to the relatively numerous inscriptions found there as dedications to Sol Invictus [4]. Dacia was depopulated by six years of war during the rule of Trajan [5], but was recolonized in A.D. 107 [6]. The cult of Sol Invictus flourished there until A.D. 270, when Rome finally lost this province.

In addition, many Syrian soldiers enlisted in the Roman army. These soldiers, who served for long periods in a strange country, did not forget their national deity [7]. When they deemed it feasible,

[1] Merchants in the vicinity of Rome, at Ostia: *CIL* XIV, p. 5; at Puteoli: *CIL* X, 1556, 1557, 1601, 1634, 1797; at Ravenna: *CIL* XI, 198a; at Aquileia: *CIL* V, 1031, 1142; in Dalmatia, at Salona: *CIL* III, 2066, 19061; in Spain, at Malaga: *CIL* II, p. 252; along the Danube, at Apulum: *CIL* III, 7761; at Sirmium: *CIL* III, 6443.

[2] At Rome: *CIL* VI, 403, 420; *CIL* VI, 700: *Soli sacrum. C. Ducenius Gai libertus Phoebus.... natus in Suria Nisibyn..*; *CIL* V, 8938: ... *Suria ... illus, negotiator, Deo Invicto votum solvit libens*; *CIL* III, 1107, in two languages: *Soli Invicto votum*; at Puteoli: *CIL* V, 1576, 1578, 1579, 1634, 2005.

[3] F. Cumont, *Textes et Monuments figurés relatifs aux Mystères de Mithra*, Brussels, I, p. 264.

[4] *CIL* III, 1107. From Sarmizegetusa: *CIL* III, 7952: *Soli Invicto L. Domitius Primanus votum solvit libens merito.* From Potaissa: *CIL* III, 879: *invicto Aurel. Montanus miles legionis V Macedonicae libens posuit*; *CIL* III, 7686: *Deo Invicto votum posuit Flavius Marcellinus, tesserarius.* From Apulum: *CIL* III, 778, *CIL* III, 1111: *Soli invicto aedem restituit G. Caerellius Sabinus, legatus Augusti legionis XIII Geminae*; *CIL* III, 1013: *Soli invicto Q. Caecillius Laetus, legatus Augusti legionis XIII Geminae.*

[5] F. Cumont, *op. cit.*, I, p. 249.

[6] Eutropius, VIII, 6: *Traianus devicta Dacia ex toto orbe Romano infinitas eo copias hominum transtulerat ad agros et urbes colendas.*

[7] *CIL* III, 2328 and ff.; *Année épigraphique* (1910), n° 133: *Deo Patrio Soli Elagabalo, milites cohortis miliariae Hemesenorum Antoninianae...*;

they joined together to erect a suitable temple for him. They felt impelled to show proper respect toward the deity they had learned as children to revere. Their assemblies were open to comrades from other places who found that their religious aspirations were not satisfied by the official religious services of their military units, and felt drawn to this faith which gave them hope of another and happier life after they had fallen on the field of battle. When transferred to other units, they also became propagators of the new faith [1].

From the time of Septimius Severus, many Easterners held seats in the Senate, and as senators continued to remain faithful to their national religion.

The spread of these Eastern cults is also to be ascribed to the fact that their priests were not public functionaries. The only concern of these priests was to serve their deity, since they could expect no advantages except those arising from their cult. It need hardly be said that they made every effort to disseminate their religion as widely as possible, and it would therefore be difficult not to conclude that their proselytism was more intensive and persistent than that of the members of the old Roman colleges or religious societies, who usually had to combine their religious function with a political or administrative office that took up most of their free time. Whereas in Rome membership in the special clerical colleges was reserved to persons of noble birth or members of the senatorial order, in the Eastern religions persons of every kind and station, even freedmen and women, could fill a priestly office, and many of these became active propagandists of the faith [2].

During the time of the Severi, the sympathy entertained by the imperial family for the Eastern cults in general and the cult of Sol Invictus in particular, was a very important factor that facilitated

Année épigraphique (1910), n° 141: *Deo Soli Aelagabalo cohors miliaria Antoniniana Hemesenorum...*; *Bulletin archéologique* (1931) p. 399: *Deo Soli ortum constitutum per G. Iulium Aelurionem... praepositum Numeri Hemesenorum, delapsum restituit...*

[1] This was also the case of the followers of Mithras, cf. F. Cumont, *op. cit.*, p. 248; M. J. Vermaseren, *Mithras*, pp. 24-28.

[2] cf. *infra*: the cult of Dea Caelestis. *CIL* VI, 37170, as priestesses Flavia Epicharis, Sextia Olympias and Chrestina Dorcadius. *Bulletin archéologique* (1893), p. 200 for Porcia Veneria; *ibid.* (1898), p. 223 for Veturia Martha.

their spread. As early as A.D. 179, when in command of the North-Syrian legion, toward the end of the rule of Marcus Aurelius [1], Septimius Severus unavoidably came into contact, in their most important centre, with the Eastern philosophers who taught the supremacy of *Sol Invictus Elagabal* in their writings and preaching.

Even more important, in his later life as well, was the fact that he had the opportunity to enter into relations with the priestly house of Emesa and the high priest's family. L. Septimius Severus and later Caracalla, repeatedly showed their partiality for Syria. Septimius Severus married Julia Domna, a member of this family. His wife's father, Julius Bassianus, was the *sacerdos amplissimus Dei Solis Invicti Elagabali* of Emesa [2]. As a result, more and more Syrians went to Rome, sat in the Senate, or held an office that placed them close to the Emperor. Their religious influence was the greater because they were adherents of the cult with which the imperial family was to be so closely related from that time on.

Caracalla bestowed on Emesa not only the honorary title of *colonia* but also the *ius Italicum* [3]. Religious syncretism made great strides, but in a form in which everyone could maintain his own preference. Under these circumstances, the cult of *Sol Invictus Elagabal*, which was also propagated by the imperial princesses Julia Domna and Julia Maesa, acquired a dominant influence. At the beginning of the third century A.D., at the request of Julia Domna, Philostratos wrote the biography of the philosopher-magus Apollonius of Tyana in Cappadocia, who during his life in the first century A.D. had been a devotee of the sun god and after his death had been glorified as a demigod by the later Neo-Pythagorians [4].

In his edict on the awarding of citizenship, Caracalla expressed the wish that a single religious faith and cult be universally accepted,

[1] *Historia Augusta, Vita Severi*, 3, 6: *legioni IV Scythicae dein praepositus est*; according to A. Domaszewski, "*Die politische Bedeutung der Religion von Emesa*" in *ARW*, XI, 1909, p. 223; A. Piganiol, *Histoire de Rome*, Paris 1939, 1954[4], p. 396.

[2] Victor, *Epitome*, 21, 2 and 23,2.

[3] A. Piganiol, *op. cit.*, p. 399.

[4] F. Sassen, *Geschiedenis van de Wijsbegeerte der Grieken en Romeinen*, Brussels-Antwerp 1949[4], p. 160; Philostrates, *Vita Apollini*, II, 38; VI, 10; VII, 30; P. de Labriolle, *La réaction païenne*, Paris 1942, pp. 311 f.; J. Babelon, *Impératrices Syriennes*, Paris 1957, p. 148.

but he did not go so far as to make one of the Roman cults compulsory [1]. This was imposed by his successor Elagabalus, who officially made the sun god *Sol Invictus Elagabal* the chief deity of Rome.

All this illustrates how many Romans of all classes must have had some degree of contact with the cult of Emesa, whether in Syria itself or elsewhere in the Empire, during the centuries before the final culmination. We must also take into account the moral influence emanating from the sanctuaries such as the *Elagabalium* [2], whose ornamentation had a previously unknown splendour, and the ecstatic influence of the exquisite youth Varius Avitus Bassianus, the high priest of *Sol Invictus Elagabal*, on the legionaries who had been stationed near Emesa or who came from that region. When, in his quality as Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, the high priest of the sun god was proclaimed emperor, the Syrian national cult of this sun god threatened to oust from first place the Roman Jupiter Optimus Maximus Capitolinus.

And these are only the external factors elucidating the extraordinary spread of the sun cult of Emesa. The external factors explain much, but not everything. The receptivity of Rome and the rest of the Empire to these Eastern religions, and in particular to the cults of Mithras and Elagabal, is to be explained mainly on the basis of the dogma of these cults, which differed so radically from that of the purely Roman cults. Seen from the viewpoint of Rome, this phenomenon is clarified by the remarkable capacity of the average Roman to assimilate. Furthermore, in the course of the second century Rome had become an undermined and weakened body unable to continue to resist the attacks and infiltration of the Eastern religions. It must be kept in mind that in contrast with the Roman forms of religion these cults represented a much more advanced type. They were less primitive, less simple. The cults of the East worked much more on the emotions and feelings, they satiated the thirst for religious fervour and had much more appeal for the intellect, whose aspirations they satisfied. The theology of

[1] A. Piganiol, *op. cit.*, p. 403.

[2] The *Elagabalium* is represented on a coin published in *Annuaire de Numismatique*, XIV (1890), p. 468.

the Eastern cults showed a tendency to reduction to the deification of Time. They worshipped the celestial bodies and especially the sun who bestows warmth, fertility and life itself, and whose course determines events [1].

The Eastern mysteries stirred the feelings by alternately provoking fear and awe, compassion and enthusiasm. They also—and this is what must have persuaded many to become votaries of these deities—created the illusion that they had a scientific basis and that they offered absolute truth and certainty. The doctrines themselves were such that they attracted large masses, especially of the least well-endowed and the dissatisfied, to the new cults, which promised their followers a reward for virtue, punishment for wickedness, and a better life in the hereafter.

As postulated, the external circumstances were so extremely favourable for an increase in the influence of the Eastern religions and more particularly the Syrian cult of *Sol Invictus Elagabal*, that the latter could reach dominance when the Severi came to the throne with their half-Syrian court. Civil servants of every rank, senators and army officers competed in reverence, devotion and veneration for the tutelary deity of their emperor. Intelligent and ambitious princesses such as Julia Domna and her sister Julia Maesa were active in promoting the Syrian national cult of Sol Invictus in Rome and in other parts of the Empire.

The much-discussed grandson of Julia Maesa, Varius Avitus Bassianus, was able, as Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, to become ruler of the Roman Empire and to use his imperial power to attempt to raise this cult, of which he was *sacerdos amplissimus*, to a level higher than that of Jupiter. His too obstinate attempt, which understandably gave rise to resistance from every quarter, was not sufficiently thought out and was too rash and premature; the time was not yet ripe to expect all Romans to accept such a syncretistic concept. And the cult of *Sol Invictus Elagabal* of Emesa was certainly not ideally suitable to ensure success in this attempt. Nevertheless, since the powerful Syrian colonies would have supported the emperor's religious policies not only in Rome but

[1] F. Cumont, *Les religions orientales dans le paganisme romain*, Paris 1929 (*passim*).

throughout the Empire, he might have succeeded if he had not so consistently ridden roughshod over Roman morals and laws, including those concerning religion.

It must, however, be ascribed to the religious efforts of the Severi, especially M. Aurelius Antoninus Elagabalus and, after him, his cousin Alexander Severus, that religious development was definitely driven in the direction of syncretism.

From the early part of the second century A.D., the cult of *Sol Invictus* was dominant in Rome and in other parts of the Empire. Outside Syria, this cult persisted longer and had a much greater influence than historians and philologists have been willing to grant, even recently. Second only to the influence of the ecletic Neo-Platonic school, it was this cult of *Sol Invictus* that was largely responsible for the total victory of syncretism in the third century, perhaps even more than others whose influence has been, for understandable reasons, greatly exaggerated.

CHAPTER IV

SOL INVICTUS ELAGABAL

1. Before A.D. 218

The importance of the cult devoted to *Sol Invictus Elagabal* has received relatively little attention from philologists and historians of religion, either because its essence was not recognized or because it was identified with Mithraism [1]. It was seen as a cult imposed on Rome and the Empire by a deranged young emperor, a cult which disappeared forever after his four turbulent years of rule. This is not in agreement, however, with the conclusions we may draw from the evidence provided by epigraphic and literary sources.

The first traces of the Syrian cult of Sol Invictus in Rome and other parts of the Empire date from the middle of the second century [2], but an evaluation of the intensity of the earliest contact is difficult to arrive at. The oldest evidence dates from A.D. 158 [3] and concerns a dedication by a Roman, P. Aelius Amandus, *eques singularis Augusti*, incised on a small marble altar bearing a representation of the sun god. Although the specific *Elagabal* was not added, there can be no doubt about the identity of the *Sol Invictus Deus*. The dedication is unquestionably intended for the Syrian sun god, and therefore Cumont did not include it in his compilation [4], nor did he consider it to concern Mithras. On the other hand, it should not be taken to imply the old autochthonous sun god on the evidence of the epithet *Invictus*.

With this inscription, a member of the emperor's elite equestrian

[1] F. Lenormant, "*Elagabalus*" in *DS*, p. 531; P. Habel, *Zur Geschichte des in Rom von den Kaisern Elagabalus und Aurelianus eingeführten Sonnenkultes*, Strasbourg, 1889, pp. 95 f. According to Habel, *Sol Invictus* is to be identified with Mithras; F. Richter, "*Sol*" in *Roscher*, IV, pp. 1137-1152; H. Usener, "*Sol Invictus*", in *Reinisches Museum*, LX (1905), pp. 466-491.

[2] *CIL* VI, 715 (A.D. 158); *CIL* III, 7483 (A.D. 161-169).

[3] *CIL* VI, 715: *Soli Invicto Deo ex voto suscepto, accepta missione honesta ex numero equitum singularum Augusti, Publius Aelius Amandus donum dedit, Tertullo et Sacerdoti consulibus.*

[4] F. Cumont, *Textes et Monuments figurés*, Brussels, I-II, 1896-1899.

corps gave thanks to Sol Invictus for having been chosen to fulfil an important mission. It is therefore clear that the Syrian cult was not unknown in Rome and was not underestimated, at least in some quarters.

Rome's first contact with the Syrian cult, which had probably taken place a few years earlier, may be taken to have occurred during the rule of Hadrian (A.D. 117-138), toward the end of which relations with the East intensified. After his brilliant victories in the East had made him a celebrated hero, Hadrian permitted himself to be represented with the attributes of Hercules. He himself sought a closer identification with the sun god, whose portrait appeared on his last series of coins [1]. Indeed under this emperor the sun god had been shown with increasing frequency on the imperial coins in a chariot drawn by four horses [2]. Hadrian had accompanied Trajan on all his campaigns in Dacia and the East, and had been appointed by him legate of Syria, *legatus Syriae* [3]. From that time on, the cult of Sol Invictus became increasingly prominent. In A.D. 129, Hadrian ceased to have himself portrayed with an aureole, which he now assigned exclusively to the sun god [4].

During the reign of Antoninus Pius (A.D. 135-161), the cult of the Syrian sun god made no headway in Rome, because this highly conservative emperor made a strenuous effort to restore the old cults and rites. It remains an open question, however, whether this really helped to stem or canalize the flood of new religious ideas [5]. It is in any case certain that the earliest evidence from Rome of the cult of *Sol Invictus Elagabal* dates from the period of his reign.

During the reigns of Marcus Aurelius Antoninus (A.D. 161-180) and M. Annius Verus (A.D. 161-169), the cult of Sol Invictus continued to spread. The new spirit undermined the old religious

[1] H. Cohen, *op. cit.*, II, p, 38, n° 187, n° 188 with laurel wreath; A. Piganiol, *op. cit.*, 288: *Pourtant à la fin de son règne, quand ses victoires d'Orient eurent fait de lui un héros, il permit qu'on le représentât avec les attributs d'Hercules, et même il parut se rapprocher du Soleil, dont l'image apparait sur ses dernières monnaies.*

[2] H. Cohen, *op. cit.*, II, p. 189, n° 1003-1006, with *Oriens*; *idem* II, p. 205, n° 1180.

[3] A. Piganiol, *op. cit.*, p. 290.

[4] A. Piganiol, *op. cit.*, pp. 332-333.

[5] A. Piganiol, *op. cit.*, p. 295.

traditions. Sporadic conflicts began to occur. In military circles in particular, Sol Invictus became known in the wake of Mithras, as shown by the earliest known dedication by a centurion of the XIth legion Claudia, offered for the well-being of Verus, the adoptive brother of the emperor Marcus Aurelius [1].

In A.D. 184 an *ara* was dedicated at Rome to Sol Invictus by T. Pomponius Repentinus, *nomenclator tensarius iugaris* [2]. The title and function of this man have been the source of considerable controversy. Although it is not clear what precisely these entailed, it can at any rate be inferred that his function was religious or concerned a cult. As the inscription strongly suggests, this cult was in all likelihood the Syrian worship of *Sol Invictus Elagabal.*

On the 17th of June, A.D. 184, the date on the dedication, an important religious ceremony in honour of Sol Invictus must have taken place, during which T. Pomponius Repentinus distributed *sportulae* (baskets with food). The greatest caution must be exercised in the interpretation of this ceremony, since the text obviously does not permit the conclusion that the cult of *Sol Invictus Elagabal* was already generally known and practised in Rome. Nevertheless, we may conclude that it was sufficiently well known during the rule of Commodus (A.D. 180-192) for a religious ceremony of rather considerable proportions to occur under favourable circumstances.

A further epigraphic text is known commemorating an important event concerning this cult. It originates from Apulum in Dacia and dates from the period A.D. 183-185 under Commodus [3]. In this province, in which the worship of the sun god is known to have occupied an important place, Apulum was a very active centre of the cult of Sol Invictus. This conclusion is justified by the number of dedications found there. Although the province of Dacia was lost to the Roman Empire by the end of the reign of Aurelian (A.D.

[1] *CIL* III, 7483: *Deo Invicto, pro salute imperatoris Marci Antonini Veri, Annius Saturninus, centurio legionis XI Claudiae votum solvit libens merito.*

[2] *CIL* VI, 740: *Soli Invicto sacrum, Titus Pomponius Repentinus, nomenclator tensarius iugaris, sua pecunia donum dedit. Dedicatum XV kalendas Iulias Marullo et Aeliano consulibus. Ob dedicationem sportulas dedit singulas denarios II.*

[3] *CIL* III, 1111: *Soli Invicto, aedem restituit Gaius Caerellius Sabinus, legatus Augusti legionis XIII Geminae.*

270-275), all the dedications to Sol Invictus that do not concern Mithras refer to the Syrian *Sol Invictus Elagabal*. The text in question states that C. Caerellius Sabinus, *legatus Augusti legionis XIII Geminae*, had borne the expense of the restoration of the temple of Sol Invictus. There must have been a cult temple at Apulum much earlier, as well as a considerable number of local adherents. The imperial legate must also have acted in agreement with the sentiments of the soldiers, since the decision to have the restoration carried out was in all probability voluntary.

Another inscription, also found at Apulum may be mentioned here, with a dedication to the sun god made by the imperial legate Q. Marcius Victor Felix Maximillianus, commander of the same *legio XIII Gemina* [1], and almost certainly, from the epigraphic indication, dating from the simultaneous reign of Septimius Severus and Caracalla. Furthermore, there is the official dedication to Deus Sol Invictus offered to the sun god by the imperial procurator of the province of Dacia, M. Cocceius Genialis [2], also indicating that there were two emperors at the time. The date of the dedication must therefore fall in the reign of Septimius Severus and Caracalla, at the beginning of the third century A.D.

It can thus be seen that the cult of Sol Invictus Elagabal had acquired more and more importance in the province of Dacia. The numbers, importance, and high repute of the adepts are evident. The epigraphic dedications just mentioned demonstrate that the cult of the sun god had prominent followers and was highly regarded by the Severi.

Several other inscriptions provide evidence of the occurence of the cult of Sol in Germania and Hispania Lusitania in this period [3]. The dedication from Grand in Germania dates from the end of the second or the beginning of the third century, and the emperor referred to, Antoninus, is Caracalla or Elagabalus. The slave who

[1] *CIL* III, 1118.

[2] *CIL* III, 7662: *Deo Soli Invicto, pro salute sua et suorum M. Cocceius Genialis, vir egregius, procurator Augustorum Nostrorum provinciae Daciae Porolissi, votum libens merito posuit.*

[3] *CIL* XIII, 5940, from Grand, Germania; *CIL* II, 259, from Olisipo in Lusitania; *CIL* II, 807, from Capera in Lusitania; *CIL* II, 5319, from Caesarobriga in Lusitania.

offered the dedication probably came from a region where the cult of *Sol Invictus Elagabal* predominated. As time passed and the essence of the Sol cult underwent the influence of the Eastern cults, Sol received the epithet *aeternus* in Hispania Lusitania and as such appears in dedications together with Luna. This inscription dates from the reign of the Severi, who did so much to foster the Syrian sun cult.

Little by little, the traces of the old cult of the sun disappeared, and it was Sol Invictus to whom the dedications were made [1].

The cult of *Sol Invictus Elagabal* assumed major proportions and importance as early as the reign of Commodus, who was the first to make *invictus* a component of the imperial title and who had the sun god portrayed more frequently on his coins [2], and later under Septimius Severus, who in A.D. 193 and 194 had the words *Invicto imperatori* put on his coins [3]. This trend intensified during the reign of the Severi, as will appear from a later chapter in which the importance of the dynasty will be discussed in detail. In the present context it is sufficient to mention that the Severi are of interest not only for what they achieved politically but also in the field of religion. Despite the fundamental differences in temperament and intention between the members of this dynasty, the Severi paved the way for the wide acceptance of syncretistic concepts of religion. In this, the cult of Sol Invictus was the paramount instrument.

Septimius Severus, the founder of the dynasty, was from his childhood a fervent believer in astrology. This was later to have a decisive influence on his life when he sought as a wife a woman who had been born under the same constellation as himself. He never forgot his origins or the region from which he came.

Septimius Severus was an African from Leptis Magna who had studied law in Rome. Through the intervention of Marcus Aurelius he was admitted to the Senate and was later placed at the head of a legion in Syria. He fell out of favour under Commodus, and withdrew to Athens, where he sought the company of intellectuals. In Syria he became acquainted with Julia Domna, the daughter of the

[1] *CIL* II, 807: "*Soli Invicto Augusto sacrum*".
[2] H. Cohen, *op. cit.*, t. III, p. 294, n° 491; t. III, p. 236, n° 70.
[3] H. Cohen, *op. cit.*, t. IV, p. 28, n° 230-235.

sacerdos amplissimus Dei Solis Invicti Elagabali. In her he had found the woman intended by the gods to be his chosen wife, one who had been born under the same constellation and, in accordance with the advice of the oracle, he married her. It is sometimes forgotten that Julia Domna was later identified with Juno Caelestis, the tutelary goddess of Carthage [1]. Some years later, Elagabalus, as high priest of the sun god, united the goddess Caelestis in a theogamy with Sol Invictus Elagabal, which makes Severus' choice of a wife even more understandable and appropriate from the religious point of view.

It is also important to note here that his marriage to this Syrian woman from the very powerful priestly house of Emesa was seen by Severus as completely in accordance with the will of the sun god. Both partners represented themselves as personifications of what they considered the principal gods of the heavens, and thus appeared on coins as *Sol* and *Luna*.

Another measure taken by Septimius Severus probably had less political significance but was of great religious importance. Around A.D. 194 he divided Syria into two parts: Syria Coele, with Laodicea as capital, and Syria Phoinice, with Emesa as capital [2]. The seat of the Sol cult thus acquired political importance as well.

In this way, under the Severi, the cult of Sol became an ever stronger factor in political and religious life. A coin shows Geta with the aureole of the sun, his hand raised in salute to his father, who was now one with the highest deity [3]. From this period, too, date the important inscriptions from Intercisa (Dunapentele) in Pannonia Superior [4] and from El-Kantara in

[1] *CIL* XIII, 6671 (see also p. 96, note 3); J. Gagé, *op. cit.*, p. 197 and p. 221, 233 f.; J. Babelon, *op. cit.*, passim; Hist. Aug., *Vita Severi* 3, 8; J. Hasebroek, *Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des Kaisers Septimius Severus*, Heidelberg 1921.

[2] A. Piganiol, *op. cit.*, pp. 396-397.

[3] A. Piganiol, *op. cit.*, p. 400.

[4] *Année épigraphique* (1910), n° 133: *Pro salute et victoria Germaniae Imperatoris Caesaris Marci Aureli Severi Antonini, pii felicis augusti, Parthici maximi, Britannici maximi, Germanici maximi, pontificis maximi, patris patriae, tribunicia potestate, consulis IIII, Deo Soli Patrio Elagabalo, milites cohortis miliariae Hemesenorum Antoninianae dedicatum opus X Kalendas Septembres, Messala et Sabino consulibus.*
Année épigraphique (1910), n° 141: *Deo Soli Alagabalo, pro salute Imperatorum Luci Septimi Severi Pii et Marci Aureli Antonini Pii et Luci Septimi Getae*

Egypt [1], which provide conclusive evidence that the distribution of the cult commenced earlier and proceeded further than is commonly thought. The dissemination and acceptance of the Syrian cult of the sun would have occurred even without the extravagant efforts and perseverance of Elagabalus.

The most active propagandists for *Sol Invictus Elagabal* were the legionaries from Emesa. The *Numerus Hemesenorum* was quartered at the place now called El-Kantara between A.D. 212 and 217 [2]. The leader of this unit, C. Julius Aelurio, had established a sentry post there during the reign of Caracalla, and at his orders the soldiers erected an altar there, *ortum constitutum*, which indicates that the direction in which it faced could not be chosen arbitrarily, but was determined by the position of the sun at sunrise on a particular day [3].

Another epigraphic text found in the vicinity [4] offers evidence that another *Numerus Hemesenorum*, led by Julius Draco, had already found it necessary to renovate the temple of their national sun god, *Sol Invictus Elagabal*. Whatever the reason for the poor condition of this temple, its existence and restoration show that the need had been felt for a place in which to worship this sun god as early as the end of the second century. The date of the renovation and rededication of this temple must have fallen before A.D. 211. As the inscription indicates, the three emperors must certainly have been Septimius Severus and his two sons, Caracalla and Geta. The temple must therefore have been restored before the 14th of February A.D. 211, the date on which Septimius Severus died.

Caesaris Augusti cohors miliaria Antoniniana Hemesenorum civium Romanorum sagittariorum, cui sub Baebio Caeciliano, legato Augustorum, praeest Quintus Modius, Quinti filius, Quirina tribu, Rufinus, tribunus, templum a solo extruxit.

[1] *Bulletin archéologique* (1931), p. 399, n° 5; *ibid.* p. 401, n° 6.

[2] *Bulletin archéologique* (1931), p. 399, n° 5: *Deo Soli ortum constitutum per Gaium Iulium Aelurionem, centurionem legionis III Augustae Antoninianae, praepositum Numeri Hemesenorum*; *CIL* VIII, 2494; *Bulletin archéologique* (1931), p. 401, n° 6: *Pro salute Dominorum Nostrorum Augustorum templum Dei Solis Invicti Iulius Draco, centurio legionis III Augustae praepositus Numeri Hemesenorum, delapsum restituit dedicavitque et sigillum renovavit.*

[3] E. Albertini, "*La garnison d'El Kantara*" in *Bulletin archéologique* (1931), p. 400.

[4] *Bulletin archéologique* (1931), p. 401, n° 6 (see note 1).

It is perhaps remarkable that the specific name Elagabal is not appended to the *Deus Sol Invictus* in either of the inscriptions. It seems obvious to conclude that in this region it was not necessary to specify the sun god more particularly. The inhabitants of El-Kantara and the surrounding area knew quite well for whom the dedication was meant; the Hemeseni had seen to that. An adequate indication that it was not necessary to qualify the sun god as Elagabal is provided by an inscription found at Auctarium [1]. The dedication is solely to *Sol Invictus* and was removed after the murder of Elagabalus, when the *damnatio memoriae* had overtaken him and his deeds.

The inscriptions found at Intercisa (Dunapentele) date from several years later and bear the name of the sun god, *Sol Elagabal*. Indeed, the soldiers of the *cohors miliaria Antoniniana* were Hemeseni and faithful followers of *Sol Invictus Elagabal*. They erected a monument to their national deity to commemorate the victory in Germania of their Emperor, Marcus Aurelius Severus Antoninus [2]. The inscription dates from the end of August, A.D. 214. This devotion is supported by another epigraphic text [3]. It is therefore permissible to conclude that a temple for *Deus Sol Invictus Elagabal* was built at Intercisa in the same period as the one at El-Kantara. The sympathies of the surrounding population must therefore have been such—under the influence of the Hemeseni—as to make the building of a suitable place of worship a reasonable undertaking.

The inscriptions mentioned thus far can be dated with reasonable accuracy. This is not possible, however, for the great majority of epigraphic texts devoted to this sun god. Where it was not found strictly necessary to use the specific nomenclature of the sun god to be honoured, and this omission could not lead to confusion, it may be assumed that most undated inscriptions concerned *Sol Invictus Elagabal* and may be ascribed to a period before the rule of his high priest, Elagabalus (A.D. 218-222) [3].

[1] *Ephemeris Epigraphica* IX, 1381 = *Année épigraphique* (1912), n° 119.
[2] *Année épigraphique* (1910), n° 133 (see p. 50, note 4).
[3] *Ibid.*, n° 141 (see p. 50, note 4).
[4] Besides the datable inscriptions mentioned, the following dated epigraphic texts of dedications to Sol Invictus also belong to the period before the reign of Elagabalus: *CIL* VI, 715, from A.D. 158; *CIL* VI, 740, from A.D.

At Rome, the cult of Sol Invictus was certainly known before the religious reforms of Elagabalus. All the reliable evidence supports the view that the cult from Syria was organised to a certain degree even in the time of the Severi. The temple was undoubtedly situated outside the *pomerium* until Elagabalus took up residence at Rome as ruler of the Empire. Most of the dedications to Sol Invictus have been found outside the *Urbs* proper. At this time, there was still no question of an official cult of *Sol Invictus Elagabal*; at the most there was a favourable bias on the part of the Severi, who had learned to know and value this faith and had known how to use it for their own political ends.

The level of organization reached by this cult cannot be evaluated because insufficient data are available. The existence of *sacerdotes* who served the interests of the cult and performed the required rituals, in Rome as well as elsewhere, is adequately demonstrated by epigraphic evidence mentioning the names of Aurelius Julius Balbillus and Titus Julius Balbillus as *sacerdotes Solis*. The year in which the latter became priest of the sun god cannot be determined, but it was centainly before the end of the second century [1]. These and other inscriptions, some of which mention a *sacerdos Solis Elagabali* expressly [2], date from the period before A.D. 218.

184; *CIL* III, 1111, from A.D. 183/185; *CIL* III, 7483, from A.D. 161-180. According to F. Cumont (*Textes et Monuments*), these texts cannot refer to Mithras. One of the most important texts from this period is dated A.D. 213 and dedicated to Caracalla, who is here identified with Sol Invictus (his mother, Julia Domna, was similarly sometimes identified with Dea Caelestis: see p. 96, note 3): *CIL* XIII, 6754: *Deo Invicto Soli imperatori Caesari Marco Aurelio Antonino, pio felici augusto, Parthico maximo, Britannico maximo, pontifici maximo, tribunicia potestate XVI, consuli IIII, patri patriae, proconsuli, Quintus Iunius... Quintianus, legatus eius propraetore Germaniae superioris, devotissimus numini eius dicatissimusque.*

[1] *CIL* VI, 2270: *Tito Iulio Balbillo, sacerdoti Solis, Eutyches, Augusti libertus, officinator a statuis, amico optimo dedicat Kalendis Ianuariis, P. Cornelio Anullino II et M. Aufidio Frontone consulibus* (A.D. 199).

[2] *CIL* VI, 708: *Aquilam Soli Alagabali Iulius Balbillus*; *CIL* VI, 2269: *Tito Iulio Balbillo, sacerdoti Solis Alagabali, Eudemon, libertus, patrono optimo*; *CIL* VI, 1003: *Claudio Iuliano ... praefecto annonum, Titus Iulius Balbillus, sacerdos Solis, dedicavit Kalendas Februarias, Lucio Annio Fabiano Marco Nonio Muciano consulibus* (A.D. 201); *CIL* VI, 2129: .... *Titus Iulius Balbillus, sacerdos Solis, dedicavit Idibus Ianuariis, L. Annio Fabiano M. Nonio Muciano consulibus.* (A.D. 201).

How is this omission to be interpreted? Which sun god did the priest Balbillus serve, just in this case in which Elagabal is not explicitly mentioned? This sun god must have been either the old autochthonous Sol or Sol Invictus Elagabal, since no other sun god was addressed simply as Sol during the time of the Empire. The more logical choice of the two is the Syrian *Sol Invictus Elagabal*, his priest being *sacerdos Solis*.

This may be justified on the ground that in the middle of the second century A.D., no trace of the cult of the old autochthonous Sol remained to be found in Rome. The cult itself had never played a prominent role in the Roman religious constellation. On this point there is agreement among all historians of religion, even to the extent of assuming that Sol had no place in the Roman pantheon. Just in this period, the Eastern cults were beginning to exert a more disturbing effect than ever before on the religious life of the Roman Empire. The gods of the East—Mithras, Elagabal, Sarapis—attracted more and more interest at all social levels. It is also certain that Mithras cannot have been meant in the above-mentioned epigraphic texts, since *sacerdos Solis* was scarcely used to indicate any sacerdotal function or degree of ordination in this cult. The inscriptions mentioning Sol only and dating from the second century A.D. on the other hand, are all dedicated to *Sol Invictus Elagabal* [1].

A combination of these elements, and the fact that dedications by this same Titus Julius Balbillus to the Syrian sun god Elagabal as *sacerdos Solis Invicti Elagabali* have been preserved, permit the conclusion that he was already a priest of this sun god about twenty five years before the high priest of Sol Invictus from Emesa was acclaimed emperor of the Roman Empire as Marcus Aurelius Antoninus.

A dedication by T. Julius Balbillus to the Vestal Virgin, Numisia Maximilla, bears the date the 15th of January, A.D. 201 [2]. A few days later, on the 20th of January he had an inscription carved in

[1] F. Cumont, *Textes et Monuments*, I, p. 48, n. 5; M. J. Vermaseren, *Mithras*, pp. 113 f.; also e.g. *CIL* III, 604: *Soli aeterno, M. Laelius Aquila, sacerdos.*

[2] *CIL* VI, 2129.

honour of Claudius Julianus, the *praefectus annonum* [1]. In both cases he is indicated with the simple title *sacerdos Solis*, under which only the priesthood of Sol Invictus Elagabal is to be understood. An added subscription here is a dedication to the sun god for the welfare of the same *praefectus annonum*. The fact that a protective dedication was made for so prominent and influential a man need cause no surprise. Caracalla had already been sharing the imperial rule with Septimius Severus for several years.

On the 4th of April in the year 215, under the consulate of Laetus and Cerialis, the *sacerdos Solis* Aurelius Julius Balbillus, who was evidently a relative of the other Balbillus, dedicated an inscription in gratitude to the Vestal Virgin Terentia Flavola for the many services she had rendered him [2].

There is no reason not to conclude that at the beginning of the third century there were worshippers and followers of Sol Invictus in Rome, whose cult was served by priests, who very probably formed a college. But the scanty data do not provide sufficient information concerning the numbers of members and the organization of the cult. Two priests who served Sol Invictus simultaneously are known by name, because Titus Julius Balbillus was still alive in A.D. 215 since his inscriptions date from the rule of the young Emperor Elagabalus, as shown by the explicit will of the emperor.

Amid the religious disintegration, even anarchy, at the beginning of the second century A.D., there was an active nucleus of votaries of *Sol Invictus Elagabal*. Like other important Eastern religions, the cult of the Syrian sun god had obtained a foothold in the capital of the Empire and gradually acquired a group of adherents. The old Roman gods—Jupiter, Mars, Vesta, Juno, Hercules, Venus—continued to have their followers and were worshipped on the traditional occasions. The homage paid to the living emperors as a divinity and the cult of the *divus* after his death became more elaborate under the influence of the image of the Oriental despots. But in Rome itself these cults lost their monopoly. Mithras had

[1] *CIL* VI, 1003: ... *Soli sacrum, pro salute Claudi Iuliani, perfectissimi viri, praefecti annonum.*

[2] *CIL* VI, 2130: *Terentiae Flavolae, virgini Vestali Maximae, Aurelius Iulius Balbillus, sacerdos Solis, ob plura eius in se merita. Donum dedit pridie Nonas Apriles, Laeto II et Ceriale consulibus.*

long had a large body of followers, most of them from the lower classes and the army. In Rome, in Italy, and in the border provinces, especially the legionaries along the *limes* attended the ceremonies honouring him in numerous *mithraea*. Nevertheless, the beginning of the third century A.D. shows Mithraism at its height [1]. In his shadow the cult of Sol Invictus Elagabal had started to attract devotees, and few could distinguish between the two.

The dogma expounded by the *sacerdotes* of Sol Invictus to the faithful parallelled that of Mithraism up to a certain point, but the content and growth of the Elagabal cult diverged from Persian Mithraism. The latter reached its zenith at the beginning of the third century; at this time the cult of Elagabal first achieved acceptance in a few places, and it did not really flourish until the reign of the emperor who took the name of the deity. In that period, however brief it may have been, the cult of *Sol Invictus Elagabal* was, as it were, the only official religion. The entire social and religious life of the community was concentrated on the ceremonies honouring Elagabal, culminating on his festal days. The *damnatio memoriae* pronounced against Elagabalus was unable to cripple or kill the cult, however even though every effort was made achieve that end.

In every sense the cult of Elagabal satisfied the religious demand of the period for syncretism. The emperors of the Severus dynasty were well aware of this demand and Elagabalus thought he had succeeded in achieving it in his attempt to place Sol Invictus above Jupiter. What he wished to do was to make all other gods subservient to his. But he acted in a way that destroyed any chance of success, despite the fact that every favourable circumstance was at his disposal: the syncretistic cult, the innumerable fervent propagandists, among whom were the Syrians and the Hemeseni, and the theological school of Emesa.

The general tendency to favour this cult of the sun, especially among the soldiers stationed in the vicinity of Emesa early in

[1] L. Homo, *Les Empereurs Romains et le Christianisme*, Paris, 1931, p. 95: "Le Mithracisme à Rome, en Italie, il recrute de nombreux adeptes; il se répand dans les provinces et les armées des frontières en pratiquant avec ferveur les cérémonies. Le début du IIIe siècle marque l'apogée de la religion mithriaque".

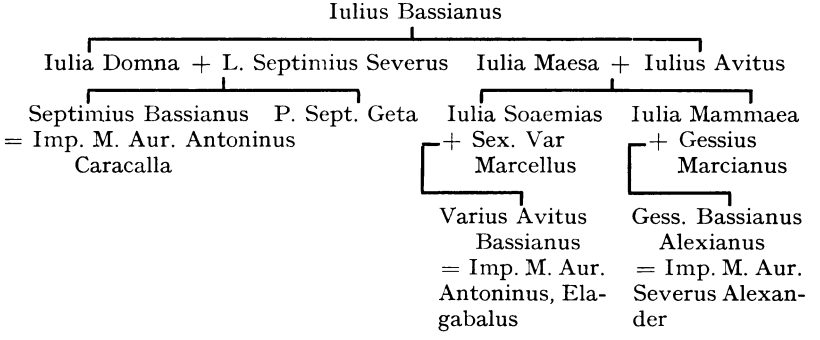
A.D. 218, was the determinating factor in the choice of the young Varius Avitus Bassianus as emperor, and also helps to explain the extraordinary rapidity with which his grandmother, Julia Maesa, was able to win military support for her plans.

2. The first steps taken by Elagabalus after his accession [1]

a) The political background [2]

For his mother, Julia Domna, the assassination of Caracalla on the 8th of April A.D. 217 meant the loss of her power. The career of the Syrian family, as sudden as it was brilliant, which she had brought to such heights, seemed doomed to be at an end. Neither Caracalla nor his mother had a male heir or an adopted son old enough to demand the succession, and Macrinus, the prefect of the Praetorian

[1] Genealogy of Elagabalus:


Iulius Bassianus
Iulia Domna + L. Septimius Severus
Iulia Maesa + Iulius Avitus
Septimius Bassianus = Imp. M. Aur. Antoninus Caracalla
P. Sept. Geta
Iulia Soaemias + Sex. Var Marcellus
Iulia Mammaea + Gessius Marcianus
Varius Avitus Bassianus = Imp. M. Aur. Antoninus, Elagabalus
Gess. Bassianus Alexianus = Imp. M. Aur. Severus Alexander

(*Prosopographia Imp. Rom.*, Vol. I, p. 194; *RE* II, p. 2541.)

[2] The historical material is to be found in: *Historia Augusta, Vita Heliogabali*; Dio Cassius, LXXVIII, 23, 2; O. F. Butler, *Studies in the Life of Heliogabalus*, London 1907 (*passim*, has to be adjusted); A. Piganiol, *Histoire de Rome*, pp. 404-405. Concerning the *Historia Augusta*, various opinions have been held. These have been summarized and discussed by P. Lambrechts in an article entitled "Le problème de l'Histoire Auguste", which appeared in *L'Antiquité Classique* (1934), p. 503. A separate analysis has been given of several of the *Vitae* and their reliability. Of particular relevance for the present discussion are: K. Höhn, *Quellenuntersuchungen zu den Viten des Heliogabalus und des Severus Alexander*, Leipzig-Berlin, 1911; A. Jardé, *Études critiques sur la vie et le règne de Sévère Alexandre*, Paris 1925; T. Optendrenk, *Die Religionspolitik des Kaisers Elagabal im Spiegel der Historia Augusta*, Bonn, 1969. Our quotations and references derive from these studies or indications provided by historically reliable authors, such as Zosimos and Dio Cassius. The others are offered with the necessary reservations.

Guard who had had Caracalla murdered, was acclaimed emperor by the army. But even then Julia Domna did not give up all hope of regaining her power. When the new emperor permitted her to reside in Antioch and even to retain the trappings of imperial dignity as an exceptional favour, he committed more than a grave psychological error. Julia Domna understood that her aspirations had been legitimized.

Julia Domna, the most eminent figure in the vicinity of the emperors Septimius Severus and Caracalla, had been well informed about affairs of state. She was a highly educated woman, accustomed to associate with philosophers and sophists. She was surrounded by the greatest jurists and physicians of the period.

Although the behaviour and attitudes of Caracalla were still more violent and crude than those of his father Septimius Severus, even toward his mother, her importance and the esteem in which she was held increased greatly during his reign. When Caracalla was absent on military campaigns, she was responsible for the imperial government, temporarily established in Antioch [1]. Letters sent to the emperor had to pass through her hands, which kept her in touch with the most important political matters. She often held the reins for long periods. Many of the civil servants surrounding her were Syrians who had reason to be well-disposed toward her, and others she had made indebted to her for all kinds of favours; she could count on all of them to support her efforts.

The courtesy with which Macrinus treated her was, from his point of view, a twofold mistake. In Antioch, Julia Domna remained virtually master of the situation when he was not in residence there. This was also a sign of the weakness of his position, as he well knew. From the moment of his implicit capitulation to her, Julia Domna directed all her activities to regaining the imperial throne. In this she obtained effective assistance from her sister, Julia Maesa, who had lived long enough at the imperial court to have developed an equally strong hunger for power. Both had an ample supply of money to consolidate an influential position. But before long Macrinus thought it wise to send the Syrian princesses and their

[1] O. F. Butler, *op. cit.*, passim; Dio Cassius, LXXVII, 18, 2, 3; J. Babelon, *Impératrices Syriennes*, Paris, 1957, passim.

families back to their native city of Emesa, because he suspected that in Antioch it would be all too easy to plan a conspiracy to place Julia Domna on the throne. The princesses, however, were acute enough to realise the risks such aspirations involved, the more so because they knew the Roman prejudice against being ruled by a woman.

After the return to Emesa, Julia Domna immediately began to work out a plan secretely to increase her political influence and ultimately to achieve supreme power by means of bribery, since she had been able to take her immense fortune with her. In Emesa she lived among relatives and friends, in circumstances that made it possible to live the modest life expected of a retired imperial princess. She herself could not become empress, and therefore had to find someone whom she could place on the throne while she retained imperial power. She found a suitable figurehead in her own family, in the person of Varius Avitus Bassianus, the grandson of Julia Maesa, later Elagabalus. Macrinus must have given some clumsy sign of having discovered the plan or aroused the suspicion that he had heard some echo of the conspiracy, since Julia Domna took her own life [1].

Her sister Julia Maesa, whose driving ambition had become focussed on political ends, did not falter, however, and thanks to her skill the plan was brought to a successful conclusion. With her, another branch of the family became predominant. Just as during the time of the first Severi, it is impossible to imagine imperial rule without the figure of Julia Domna, so, from that moment of success, is it impossible to imagine it without her sister. Before Julia Maesa, the rule of the Severi was, from the political and religious point of view, a cross between the North-African and the Syrian-Asia Minor elements. With Julia Maesa, the purely Syrian element attained dominance.

She was sensible enough to set to work methodically. She understood the mentality of the troops, their loyalty to the dynasty of the Severi, and their growing dissatisfaction with the strict discipline imposed by Macrinus, which weighed more heavily now that she had made sure that they were reminded of the better times under

[1] Dio Cassius, LXXVIII, 23, 5.

their beloved Caracalla. Julia Maesa also knew that Macrinus could not compete with her financial resources when it came to winning over the soldiers with rich promises. The city of Emesa had every reason to want its partisan to occupy the throne, and Julia Maesa could therefore also count on the moral and financial support and help of its most influential citizens. But her trump card was the personality of the boy she intended to have acclaimed as emperor.

Varius Avitus Bassianus held the office of high priest of the national sun god *Sol Invictus Elagabal* in Emesa, a hereditary function belonging to his family. His grandfather, Julius Bassianus, had served Sol Invictus before him [1], but it is not certain whether his father, Sextus Varius Marcellus, had held the office. The title does not occur in the epitaph on his gravestone, which was found at Velitrae [2].

Historians are in agreement that the face and figure of this fourteen year old boy were exceedingly beautiful. In the performance of his duties and the offering of sacrifices he wore exquisite robes glittering with jewels. His appearance must have made a deep impression on the soldiers, the more so because he was presented by Julia Maesa as a natural child of Caracalla and her daughter, Julia Soaemias, whose honour she evidently did not hesitate to sacrifice in the accomplishment of her plan.

After his campaign against the Parthians, Macrinus led his troops into their winter quarters around Emesa, Apamea, and Antioch. The legions stationed near Emesa to guard the holy city were especially dissatisfied, even mutinous, because of the restrictions the emperor had imposed on them. A shortage of food aggravated their rebelliousness, particularly when they heard that Macrinus was rolling in plenty at Antioch [3]. In this situation Julia Maesa saw her chance to realize her plans. She had the more hope of succeeding

[1] Victor, *Epitome*, 21, 2 and 23, 2. Strabo, XVI (*ed.* Meineke, Leipzig 1925, p. 753).

[2] *CIL* X, 6569: *Sexto Vario Marcello, procuratori aquarum centenario, procuratori provinciae Britanniae ducenario, procuratori rationis privatae trecenario, vice praefecto praetorio et Urbi functo, clarissimo viro, praefecto aerarii militaris, legato legionis III Augustae, praesidi provinciae Numidiae Iulia Soaemias Bassiana, clarissima femina, cum filio marito et patri amantissimo.*

[3] O. F. Butler, *op. cit.*, pp. 10 f.; Dio Cassius, LXXVIII, 28, 2-4.

because, as a result of the importance of the cult of Sol Invictus and the appeal of his young priest, she had soon won over public opinion, which quickly developed into enthusiasm for the young man.

Early in 218, Julia sent her confidential agent Eutychianus to the troops, whom he won over to the cause of Varius Bassianus by tempting promises and rich gifts [1]. It is clear that Julia Maesa knew how to make masterly use of her huge fortune for her political ends.

The military unit quartered near Emesa declared itself, in May of 218, willing to accept young Varius. On the 16th of May his mother Julia Soaemias and his grandmother Julia Maesa brought him to the camp, where he was acclaimed emperor under the name Marcus Aurelius Antoninus [2].

Macrinus responded by sending troops from Apamea, commanded by Julian, against the rebels, but they too went over to M. Aurelius Antoninus as soon as they had seen him standing on the walls of the city with the portrait of Caracalla in his hands and could convince themselves of his resemblance to the beloved emperor. Julian was murdered, and the new troops sent by Macrinus were defeated on the 8th of June 218, about twenty miles south of Antioch. Macrinus fled even before the news of the outcome of the battle had reached him. On the 17th of June, on his way to join the Parthians, he was captured in Bithynia with his son Diadumenianus and killed.

The young emperor, who had himself called Elagabalus after the sun god whose high priest he was, did not wait for complete certainty about Macrinus' fate before assuming imperial power. During the night of the 8th of June he set out for Antioch, where he made his triumphal entry the next day. As a reward every soldier received the sum of 500 drachmas [3]. Julia Maesa saw her ambition fulfilled when she became *mater castrorum et senatus*.

The conquest by the East was complete. A boy of fourteen became emperor of the Roman Empire because he was beautiful and a

[1] Dio Cassius, LXXVIII, 31, 1.

[2] *Ibid.*, LXXVIII, 32, 2; the date May 16th is questioned by Wirth in *Quaestiones Severianae*, p. 40, where he proposes April 16th. In our opinion, however, his arguments are adequately countered by O. F. Butler, *op. cit.*, pp. 14 f.

[3] *Ibid.*, LXXIX, 1, 1.

priest. From that moment, the Roman world was governed by women of Emesa. The young emperor, who lived only for his god, Sol Invictus Elagabal, wanted to oust Jupiter Optimus Maximus from first place in the religious tradition and put his sun god in that place. The Senate of Rome was forced to bow before this sun god and his high priest, both of whom were equally strange to everything Roman or Western.

b) *The religious reforms of the Emperor Elagabalus*

The etymology of "Elagabal" [1]

The Invicible Sun God of Emesa probably originated in Canaan, and had retained his ancient nature as the personification of the male principle and of fertile warmth. He was called Elagabal (Elegabal, Elaeiagabal, Heliogabal), i.e., El-Gabal: the god Gabal [2]. The most plausible etymologies are the following.

"Gabal" is considered to originate from the Semitic word *gabal*, which means massive or exalted. From *gabal* is derived the Arabic word for mountain, as in the names of various mountainous regions or cities on heights, for example the high country south of the Dead Sea called Gebalene. The well-known city of Byblos was formerly called Gebal [3], undoubtedly because it is situated on a mountain. The same root is found in the place-name Gabala, a city situated north of Byblos on the Syrian coast not far from Laodicea. In the first book of Kings there is a reference to the country of the Giblites, which is now Djoubaïl, north of Beirut, not far from Byblos.

It may therefore be assumed that the term *gebal* in Aramaic and Syriac was used to indicate high places. Thus, the god *Gabal* may have been the god of high places, of the heights. His cult and his principal symbol, a conical black stone, are in complete agreement with those of the high places mentioned in the Old Testament. The sun god Elagabal must therefore have had his places of worship in the mountains before he was worshipped at Emesa, in the valley of the Orontes.

[1] The etymological explanations of the name Elagabal are summarized and discussed in the work of J. Réville, *La religion à Rome sous les Sévères*, Paris 1907², pp. 243 f., and are mentioned here only for the sake of completeness.

[2] F. Lenormant, *Sol Elagabalus*, *RHR* III (1881), p. 310.

[3] Ezekiel, XXVII, 9 (quoted by F. Lenormant, *op. cit.*, in *RHR*).

A different etymology is put forward by F. Lenormant in his article *Sol Elagabalus* [1], in which he identifies the god *Gabal* of Emesa with the old Chaldean god of fire whose name is written *bil-gi* and pronounced *gibil*. According to Lenormant's hypothesis, the god Gibil had already been worshipped by pre-Semetic peoples, including the Sumerians and the Accadians, who later adopted the Chaldeo-Babylonian religion. From there he became known to other Semites. Lenormant cites inscriptions in which *Gibil* means the God of the Black Stone, the god of cosmic fire, of the flame of the sacrifice, or of the domestic hearth. It would therefore not be surprising if this fire god, once transported to Syria, was identified there with the sun.

Both these etymologies have a certain acceptable basis, but the hypothesis put forward by Fuller and Tiele and included in Lenormant's article, is also worthy of consideration [2]. According to them El-Gabal means simply the god-former or creator, derived from the Syrian root *gebal* meaning to end, complete, and, by extension, form, create. No other etymology is in such good agreement with the idea held by the third-century Syrians of Emesa, concerning their god, Sol Elagabal. But the question remains whether this hypothesis really explains the form of the name. El-Gabûl or El-Gebîl would fit better than El-Gabal. These considerations, however, have only relative value, since the Syrian form of Elagabal was not handed down directly. This last etymology seems the most probable to Réville. Furthermore, it does not exclude the other two. The root *gabal* from which the Arabic word for mountain derives, has given rise to the formation of verbal stems meaning either massive or exalted or to exalt. In Syriac and Arabic the verb *gabal* (or *gebal*) is used, like the Greek πλάσσω, in the sense of form or manipulate, which explains the Hebrew meaning of complete, define, limit (cf. *geboul* = border) and in Syriac form or create.

Thus, the sun god of the heights in the mythology of Canaan can be related to the god who is maker or creator. Although there is not a single positive fact available that can be accepted as conclusive

[1] See p. 62, note 2.

[2] F. Lenormant, *op. cit.*, in *RHR* has cited Fuller, *Miscellanea sacra*, I, 14, and C. P. Tiele, *Manuel d'Histoire des Religions*, Paris 1885, p. 346.

evidence except the common symbol of the Black Stone, it is not improbable that the god Gibil of the Chaldeans and the god Gebal of the Hemenesi had, if not a common origin, at least original analogies, or that the cult of the former influenced that of the latter.

Whatever the origin of Sol Invictus Elagabal may have been, as the paramount god of Syria he was worshipped in the form of a black, conical meteorite bearing mysterious signs symbolizing the sun. This stone belonged to the meteorites that occupied an important place in the Syro-Phoenician religion. Sol Invictus Elagabal was, to his votaries in the third century, a sun god, the personification of the life principle and fertility, pre-eminently the highest god [1]. He received generous tribute, not only from the inhabitants of Emesa but also from barbarian princes or the satraps of the surrounding regions, who annually brought him many handsome votive offerings.

In Emesa, on the Orontes, Sol Invictus Elagabal had a six-pillared temple which, as was often the case in Eastern countries, was ornamented with gold and jewels. This beautiful temple, the eagle—the bird of the sun—on or beside the sacred stone, or the handsome altar on which the priests performed sacrifices to him, were frequently represented on the coins of Emesa [2].

Offerings poured into the temple from all quarters; a treasure of gold, silver, and precious stones accumulated. The cult of the sun god was celebrated with Eastern pomp. Every morning, the young Avitus Bassianus performed the rites before the black stone, robed in a gold-stitched cloak with wide sleeves, a golden crown set with diamonds on his head. During the ritual the high priest was accompanied by the music of flutes, trumpets, horns, and other instruments played by dancing women.

[1] J. Réville, *op. cit.*, pp. 243 f.; J. Gagé, *op. cit.*, pp. 323 f.; see also p. 62, note 2.

[2] T. E. Mionnet, *Description de médailles antiques*, V, p. 230, supp. VIII, 157; F. Studniczka, in *Römische Mitteilungen*, XVI, pp. 274 f., pl. XII; T. E. Mionnet, *op. cit.*, V, 227, n° 592 ff.; H. Cohen, *Description historique des monnaies frappées sous l'empire romain*, Paris, 1886², IV, p. 349. with the inscription: *Sancto Deo Soli Elagabalo*; *ibid.* IV, p. 330, n° 64, with the inscription: *Invictus sacerdos Augustus sacra cognoscens*; *Annuaire de Numismatique*, XIV (1890), p. 469; W. Wroth, *Catalogue of the Greek coins of Galatia, Cappadocia and Syria*, London 1899, p. 238, n° 9 and 17.

Each year, splendid games, the ἡλιὰ πυθία, were held in honour of Sol Invictus Elagabal, which drew huge crowds to the sanctuary [1].

When the high priest was made emperor and had to depart for Rome, he was reluctant to leave Emesa, the seat of his pontificate. He had to leave the temple behind, but he could not resist taking his beloved god with him to the capital of the Empire. The voyage was undertaken without delay, but progress was difficult and slow. Not only the requirements of the sumptuous imperial court had to be taken into consideration but also those of the divine dignity of Sol Invictus [2], who, in the form of the celebrated conical stone, accompanied the cortège on a magnificent chariot.

Delayed by the lateness of the season and an indisposition of the emperor during the journey, the imperial court was forced to spend the winter in Nicomedia. Here, the true nature of the young emperor first became apparent when he took the first steps toward the execution of his plans. His greatest wish was to give Sol Invictus Elagabal the leading position in the Roman pantheon. To this end he made use of every means provided by his imperial authority. The trip to Rome resembled a crusade to win everyone to his cult. In Taurus he had a temple dedicated to Sol Elagabal [3], and another was built in Nicomedia, where the dedication and subsequent daily offerings were accompanied by the usual Syrian excesses.

As emperor, Elagabalus led a carefree life. Ignorant of politics, he turned over the government of the Empire, even matters of a current nature, to his grandmother. His only concern was his religion, and this was apparent from the first days of his reign. He thought of nothing else but his cult and anything connected with it.

In Emesa, from his childhood up to the moment he was chosen emperor, this boy had lived in a milieu and in a family where everything and everyone brought him into contact with the worship of Elagabal, the sun god, who had long been served as high priest by various members of his family. In the theological school of Emesa he had been initiated into the mysteries of the cult and he had studied its dogma in the finest detail, for the boy was pre-

[1] F. Lenormant, *Elagabalus*, in *DS* II, p. 529.
[2] Dio Cassius, LXXIX, 11, 1.
[3] *Historia Augusta, Vita Caracallae*, 11; *ibid., Vita M. Antonini*, 26.

destined for the high office of *sacerdos amplissimus*. That he was extremely acute became all too apparent during the brief years of his rule, particularly from the shrewdness with which he continually devised new means to bring variety to his voluptuous life. We may therefore assume that he realized very early what was intended for him.

For several years his grandmother, Julia Maesa, and especially her sister Julia Domna, had played a very considerable role in world events. It is indeed remarkable that the cult of *Sol Invictus Elagabal* did not assume an eminent place in the religious life of Rome much earlier, from the moment that Julia Domna, a member of the same high priestly family, reached the height of her power. This is perhaps adequately explained by the fact that Domna had turned more towards Hellenism and philosophy, and liked to surround herself with the foremost philosophers of the time. Julia Maesa and her family, to the contrary, had remained faithful to the religion and deity of their native city. Her father Bassianus was the priest of the sun god and she was therefore very close to everything to do with the cult of the sun, remaining a fanatical adherent throughout her life. This is unequivocally illustrated by the fact that she would not rest until her two grandsons had been accepted as high priests and had been completely initiated before they ascended the throne. It is therefore easy to understand how the intense effect of both these women made the imperial court a centre from which flowed the strength to complete the development of religious syncretism. This force was tempered after the death of Caracalla and during the few months of the reign of Macrinus, but now, more distinctly than before and, during the preceding months, more intensively than ever religious syncretism was propounded with renewed vigour by imperial circles.

Up to this time, the young Varius Avitus Bassianus had only been a tool in the hands of the royal princesses, who after all were seeking only their own advantage. But from the moment of his acclamation as emperor, the fourteen year old boy had begun to act independently as Elagabalus, at least in religious matters. Once on the throne he felt himself to be exclusively the servant and counterpart of his deity, *Sol Invictus Elagabal*. Maesa encouraged him in

this. His knowledge of the dogma and mysteries of the cult, together with his experience on the political level, made him a personality capable of an independent existence. He began to define the way in which syncretism was to develop and take final form. With the energy proper to youth, he turned evolution into revolution.

To a certain extent he had of course become familiar with the religious demands of his time. As high priest of Sol Invictus he had learned a great deal about the evolution of the religious expectations of neighbours and foreigners. For him, the cult of Sol Invictus was to become the incarnation of syncretism. As emperor, there was seemingly nothing to prevent him from realizing what might be called the ideal of his life.

Seen in this light, it is easier to understand the fact that he paid no attention to purely political events or processes. Everything he did or decreed was inspired by the demands of the necessity to realize his plan. The precepts of his religion determined the rules of behaviour he had followed and continued to follow during his journey to Rome and his residence there. This was the most serious mistake he committed.

Despite the fact that there was every reason to moderate or discard his Eastern customs and manners, he remained a Syrian, and a Syrian of a special kind. What was customary in his native city could only give offence elsewhere, and especially in Rome. Never before had the Roman customs been so rudely violated, never before had the Romans seen such insolence. Elagabalus, the emperor, would wear only his Asiatic costume of purple and gold-embroidered silk, his necklaces and bracelets. Assiduously he celebrated the orgies of his god and, surrounded by the woman and eunuchs of his harem, he lived a life of lascivious debauchery.

As early as during his stay in Nicomedia, Elagabalus had begun his intended religious reformation of the Roman religion. He had his portrait painted there, in the vestments of the high priest, sacrificing before the symbol of Sol Invictus, the conical black stone. He sent this portrait ahead to Roma, commanding that the senators were to hang it in the Curia above the portrait of the goddess Victoria: the first sign of the approaching supremacy of the sun god. In addition, the senators were to offer incense and libations in honour of

Sol Invictus Elagabal at the beginning of each session. And even all this was not sufficient. From then on, he required those who had to make a public offering or perform a sacred act to pronounce the name of *Sol Invictus Elagabal* before that of any other deity, even Jupiter. This decree held for any sacrifice made by anyone under the Roman magistrates [1].

Whatever his attitude may have been toward everything and everyone, however recklessly he may have trampled on ancient Roman morals and customs, and whatever may have taken place during the first months of his reign, the young emperor enjoyed a certain public esteem and was even greatly loved by his soldiers. Everywhere in the Empire inscriptions dating from the early period of his rule, i.e. the years A.D. 218 and 219, bear witness that Elagabalus was called *indulgentissimus* [2].

In the principal places he passed through on his journey to Rome, Elagabalus established the first official temples of *Sol Invictus Elagabal*. Although with regard to these temples the oldest historians give no exact indications other than the mentioning them, the attitude of the young emperor indicates that he did not depart from, for instance, Taurus and Nicomedia before setting up an organized college of priests. These colleges would have been concerned with the sacrifices and other rites of the Invincible Sun God Elagabal, a symbolic and—as we will show—iconic representation of whom was in all probability placed in the handsome temples. This would explain why the journey took so long. These temples were not perhaps large, grand, or new buildings, but rather temples that were already in use and were now adapted to the supreme majesty of the sun god at the wish and according to the directions of the emperor. Alternatively they may have been temporary sanctuaries, the emperor leaving behind the necessary instructions for the building of the final temple as well as for its servants.

Early in 219, Elagabalus set out for Rome from Nicomedia. When he arrived it was not as an unknown, for his fame had

[1] Herodianus, V, 5, 11-13.

[2] *CIL* II, 4766: *Imperatori Caesari .. M. Aurelio Antonino,.. tribunicia potestate II, ... fortissimo felicissimoque principi...*; *CIL* VIII, 10304: *Imperator Caesar... M. Aurelius Antoninus... felicissimus atque invictissimus ac super omnes retro principes indulgentissimus ....*

preceded him. Barely a month after the decisive victory of his troops over Macrinus, on the 14th of July A.D. 218, a decree of the Roman senate had made him member of the Antoniniani [1], and on the same day, again by senatorial decree, he was included among the *sacerdotes in aede Iovis Propugnatoris* [2].

3. The establishment of the cult of Sol Invictus Elagabal at Rome

a. *The arrival of Elagabalus in Rome*

The date of the young emperor's arrival in Rome is not certain, but must have taken place between the beginning of July and the 29th of September 219 [3], when an inscription was placed on an altar of Hercules Magusanus to commemorate the event [4]. It is evident from this inscription that the troops welcomed him favourably, even those quartered in other parts of the Empire. They expected him to continue the policies of Caracalla.

When, after his long and fatiguing but memorable journey, he had installed himself in his residence at Rome and the enormous impression made on him by the capital of the world had begun to

[1] *CIL* VI, 2001: *Imperatore Antonino pio felice augusto et Oclatinio Advento consulibus anno post Romam conditam DCCCCLXX pridie Idus Iulias in aede divi pii et divae Faustinae, Imperator Caesar Marcus Aurelius Antoninus pius felix augustus, pontifex maximus, tribunicia potestate, consul, pater patriae, proconsul, ex senatus consulto cooptatus.*

[2] *CIL* VI, 2009: *Imperatore Caesare Marco Aurelio Antonino, pio felice augusto et Oclatino Advento consulibus, anno post Romam conditam DCCCCLXX, pridie Idus Iulias, in Palatio in aede Jovis Propugnatoris, ex senatus consulto Imperatorem Caesarem Marcum Aurelium Antoninum, pium felicem augustum, pontificem maximum, tribunicia potestate, consulem, patrem patriae, proconsulem cooptaverunt.*

[3] Eutropius, VIII, 22: *Is Romam venisset ... biennoque post et octo mensibus tumultu interfectus est militari.* He therefore states here that the murder of Elagabalus occurred two years and eight months after his arrival in Rome. Dio Cassius, LXXIX, 3, 3 gives March 6th or 11th A.D. 222 as the date of the murder, which dates the arrival in Rome at the beginning of July, A.D. 219.

[4] *CIL* VI, 31162: *Herculi Magusano ob reditum Domini Nostri Marci Aureli Antonini, pii felicis augusti, equites singulares Antoniniani... III kalendas Octobras, Imperatore Domino Nostro Antonino Augusto II et Tineo Sacerdote II consulibus.*

subside, he resumed, in the majestic and aristocratic capital of the Empire, the shameless performance of all the scurrilous practices of the Eastern court.

In the past three centuries, Rome had already experienced many shocking events, and had witnessed the expression of every kind of human feeling. Many divergent ways of thinking had come into conflict, and although some of them disappeared, others were reconciled and became stronger and more vital as a result of the contact; they united and appealed to broader groups.

But after the arrival of Elagabalus in Rome, the centre of the world became familiar with the maddest dissipation the eunuchs were capable of conceiving, an unbridled exhibition of prurience with not the least artistic value.

In evaluating this situation our sources are limited to the old historians, not all of whose surviving works are equally reliable. This reservation certainly applies to the biographer of Elagabalus in the *Historia Augusta*, and consequently most philologists agree as to the profligacy of the young emperor, but resolutely refuse to place any trust in the many anecdotes cited in the *Vita Elagabali*. Nevertheless, we may not reject these Lives out of hand. Among the many enormities attributed to Elagabalus is the establishment of a senate of women, *senaculum mulierum*, whose existence has been confirmed by an epigraphic text [1]. This senate has usually been considered to belong to legend and placed among the racy anecdotes about his life. But even without the evidence of the text in question it could have been accepted. Throughout his life, Elagabalus gave signs of an inner compulsion that repeatedly led him to attempt to identify himself with the female principle by dressing in women's clothing and imitating them. This was probably not merely the whim of an effeminate youth but also the indirect result of one of the fundamental principles of the Sol cult which—singular as it may seem—wished to incorporate the female as well the male principle in a single divine being.

In this *senaculum mulierum*, at a time in which the Empire was beginning to show peripheral fissures, the subjects of deliberation

[1] *Notizie degli Scavi di Antichità*, 1914, p. 141 (quoted by A. Piganiol, *op. cit.*, p. 412).

were the things closest to a woman's heart: clothes, fashion, forms of address, the hierarchy, and the like [1].

Elagabalus' life shows no trace of any concern for the well-being of his people. On the contrary, every measure taken by the imperial administration was directed toward the well-being of the emperor. He knew no other law than his own pleasure, tolerated no official in his vicinity who was not prepared to condone his debauchery, and accepted no obligations besides those imposed by the service of his god. His ingenuity in finding occasions for lecherous festivities was unbounded [2]. Under his elegant imperial robes he remained exclusively the priest of *Sol Invictus Elagabal*; he lived only for his cult and used every possible means for the glorification of his god. Above all else, he was *sacerdos amplissimus Dei Solis Invicti Elagabali*, and even on the most official documents had this title placed before that of *pontifex maximus* [3]. This is the case for the only surviving official document issued by Elagabalus [4], in which he granted his legionaries the *ius conubii* with respect to any woman whatever, even to the extent that the children born of a marriage with a woman having only the *ius peregrinum* were given the same rights as those born of a Roman marriage in which both parents had full citizenship.

His activities in the field of religion are much better known. Most of the coins struck during his reign carry a motto or device connected with the cult of *Deus Sol Invictus Elagabal*. On some of the coins the emperor is shown performing his priestly function, offering at an altar [5]; others carry the anthropomorphized figure

[1] F. Altheim, *Die Soldatenkaiser*, Frankfurt 1939, p. 229.

[2] *Chronica of St Hieronymus ad annum Abrah.* 2234: *Marcus Aurelius Antonini Caracallae, ut putabatur, filius, et sacerdos Eliogabali templi, adeo impudice in imperio vixit, ut nullum genus obscenitatis omiserit.*

[3] *CIL* X, 5827: *Honori Imperatoris Marci Aurelii Antonini, pii felicis augusti, sacerdotis amplissimi Invicti Solis Elagabali, pontificis maximi...*; *CIL* XI, 3774: *Imperatori Caesari Marco Aurelio Antonino, pio felici augusto, sacerdoti Dei Solis Invicti Elagabali, pontifici maximo .....*

[4] *CIL* III, p. 1997: *Imperator Caesar, divi Antonini Magni Pii Augusti filius, divi Severi Pii nepos, M. Aurelius Antoninus, pius felix augustus, sacerdos amplissimus Dei Invicti Solis Elagabali, pontifex maximus ....*; *CIL* XVI, 139; *CIL* XVI, 141.

[5] H. Cohen, *op. cit.*, IV, p. 329, n° 58; *ibid.*, p. 330, n° 59 and n° 61; all with the reading *Invictus Sacerdos Augustus.*

of the sun god [1]. Many show part of the magnificent annual procession: the chariot carrying the conical stone drawn by four horses [2].

So closely was the emperor connected with Sol Invictus that he not only assumed his name but also usually presented him as his companion, *Comes* [3], and protector, *Conservator* [4].

In the same way as his protector, the sun god, was invincible, *invictus*, Elagabalus used the epithet *invictus* for himself and thus implied that he was unconquerable. On this point he entertained great expectations. He imagined that he appealled to the imaginations of his subjects. The unconquerable sun god, *Sol Invictus Elagabal, Conservator Augusti*, had also made his protégé *invictus*. After Elagabalus this term remained part of the imperial title.

b) *The founding of the temples*

From the foregoing, the intention of Elagabalus is quite clear. His religious *credo*—as it is sometimes called—can be summarized as follows: to combine all religions and make them subservient to the supremacy of Sol Invictus Elagabal.

The task to which the emperor had dedicated his life was consistent with the Roman tendency toward syncretism. But regarded synoptically, the path leading in this direction had to be smoothed and caution was required in treading it. The emperor had a clear vision of the goal; he had been shown it by his teachers of the theological school of Emesa and by those in his immediate vicinity in Syria. But his inexperience made the young man ignorant of the proper tools to achieve it.

Before his arrival in Rome, everything seemed to be plain sailing. The organization of the local temples, the instructions for the local servants of Sol Invictus Elagabal, the commands sent in advance to Rome, all seemed to justify the expectation that things would proceed smoothly. But only a few days after teaching Rome he was forced to realize that the religious revolution he had planned would

[1] *ibid.*, p. 325, n° 19.
[2] *ibid.*, p. 325, n° 16.
[3] *CIL* X, 5331: *Soli Invicto, comiti Augusti nostri.*
[4] H. Cohen, *op. cit.*, IV, p. 325, n° 16: *Conservator Augusti*; *CIL* X, 7337: *Soli Invicto Conservatori Imperatoris Antonini Augusti.*

not be accomplished as easily as he had thought. The disruptive effect of his unconcealed foreign habits was considerable. However depraved Rome may already have been, his manners were not calculated to win the hearts of the people, which was what he meant to achieve, and therefore had to happen. He then chose a different course, even though he was not to maintain it for long.

This pattern reappears throughout Elagabalus' reign. When he realized or was shown by his grandmother that he had gone too far, he took another tack temporarily, lived in a more typically Roman style, performed in this guise some striking act that seemed to imply reform, but then reverted to his traditional profligacy until another modulation seemed unavoidable. Because of this, some authors have drawn the erroneous conclusion, that his attempts at reform bore no fruit. But the fact is that the reforms he attempted correspond too well with the spirit of the times not to survive him.

When, shortly after his arrival in Roma, Elagabalus sensed the need for a rapprochement with Rome and the *Romanitas*, he saw marriage with a Roman woman as the obvious solution. The most suitable choice for him was Julia Cornelia Paula [1]. When the marriage took place, he distributed money to the populace, according to Roman custom.

With the festivities celebrating first his arrival in Rome and then his marriage, Elagabalus thought he had done enough to induce the Romans to accept his Eastern customs sympathetically. In fact, however, his first concern was to find accommodation for *Sol Invictus Elagabal* suitable to the dignity and the role of the sun god. Since the imperial family and the court had left Emesa and spent the winter in Nicomedia, the symbol of Sol Invictus had been virtually without proper quarters. The handsome temple to which

[1] Dio Cassius, LXXIX, 9, 1-2. The oldest Alexandrian coin bearing the name of his first wife, Julia Cornelia Paula, is dated 28 August 219. It required three or four weeks to bring a message from Rome to Alexandria, so the marriage must have taken place around 24-28 July. In the same way the date of his arrival mentioned by Eutropius (*cf.* note 137; O. F. Butler, *op. cit.*, pp. 14 f.) can be confirmed. *CIL* X, 4554: *Iulia Cornelia Paulae Augustae donum dedit*; this is the only dedication found concerning one of his wives unless the following was for his second wife, i.e. *AE.*. (1944), p. 31, n° 104: *Iulia Aquilliae Severae, sanctissimae augustae, matri castrorum, senatus ac Patriae, ordo municipii Brigetionis*, which was found at Brigetio in Pannonia.

so many came to plead for the influence and protection of the Syrian national sun god and from which they departed consoled and strengthened, was located in Emesa. In all likelihood a symbolic or iconic representation of the sun god was left there after the departure of the conical stone, so that the devotees of Sol Invictus could continue the cult.

In Taurus and Nicomedia, temporary centres were also established for the cult. Thanks to the *Hemeseni*, there were temples in Intercisa in Pannonia Superior and in El-Kantara in Egypt. Rome had become acquainted with Sol Invictus Elagabal under the Severi and also had a college of priests wo tended the cult. But Rome still had no temple to equal that of Emesa, and it was not long before Elagabalus had two elegant temples constructed to provide his sun god with suitable accommodation.

The first of these temples was erected on the Palatine. This temple, which was called the *Elagabalium*, was only of medium size but its ornamentation was exceptional. With the Eastern carpets and precious stones of every kind and colour, this building rivalled that of Emesa [1]. For the emperor, its location near the palace was the most suitable and convenient possible, since as the high priest of *Sol Invictus Elagabal*, he had to go to the temple every day [2]. It is evident that this temple on the Palatine must have been magnificent, both because of the special position of its *sacerdos amplissimus*, who grudged it nothing and lacked for nothing, and because of the fact that the deity destined to become the highest in the Empire could

[1] Rubble has been excavated on the Palatine, but the assumption that it represents the remains of the *Elagabalium* does not have universal support, *cf.* A. Baumeister, *Denkmäler des klassischen Altertums*, Munich 1885-88, p. 1484, pl. 1441; Hieronymus, *Chronica ad annum Abrah.* 2235 = A.D. 221; Th. Optendrenk, *op. cit.*, pp. 84 f.

[2] This location is indicated by Dio Cassius, LXXIX, 12,1 as well as by Zonaras, XII, 4 and Herodianus, V, 6, 7. Furthermore, there is the evidence of Victor, *De Caesaribus*, 23, 1, that Elagabalus housed his deity *in Palatii penetralibus*.

On the Forum remains have been excavated of a capital of a column whose structure corresponds to that of the Palatine. On this basis C. Hülsen *Die Ausgrabungen auf dem Forum Romanum*, in *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Röm. Abteil.*, vol. 17 (1902), p. 62), put forward the hypothesis that there must also have been a temple on the Forum dedicated to Sol Invictus Elagabal.

not be given a dwelling in Rome that was less seemly and luxurious than his temple in Emesa [1]. According to the emperor's plans, this *Elagabalium* was to be the centre of the cult in Rome.

A second, not less sumptuous temple was built in the lower city, called *ad Spem Veterem*, the district near the *Porta Praenestina*, probably in the imperial gardens. This temple was the focal point of the great festivities of *Sol Invictus Elagabal* celebrated at mid-summer.

Sol Invictus Elagabal thus had two of the most beautiful buildings in Rome devoted to his worship. This formed the basis on which Elagabalus could carry out his religious reforms. Although this religious reformation meant a revolution in the religious life of the Romans and he was warned on all sides, not least by his grandmother, that the consequences might be fatal for his cause and himself, the young emperor refused to deviate from the path he had chosen.

For centuries, Jupiter Optimus Maximus Capitolinus had enjoyed the reverence and devotion that the first among the gods could command for himself. But when the influence of the Eastern cults began to act on the traditional religious ideas of the Romans, Jupiter lost this unapproachable supremacy. He became identified with certain Eastern deities who did not have the same supremacy in their local cults, for instance Jupiter Optimus Maximus Dolichenus, Jupiter Optimus Maximus Damascenus and Jupiter Optimus Maximus Heliopolitanus.

For Elagabalus such identification was not sufficient. He consolidated the symbol of his religious convictions in the following way. Since only one thing was important to him, i.e. his function of high priest and all that it entailed, the execution of his plan can be simply described as giving *Sol Invictus Elagabal* precedence over

[1] Depicted on coins of Julia Domna and Julia Maesa, *cf.* W. Wroth, *Catalogue of the Greek coins of Galatia, Cappadocia and Syria*, London 1899, pp. 238-239. A picture of the *Elagabalium* also appears in *Annuaire Numismatique*, XIV (1890), p. 468. An idea of the temple at Rome can be formed from the representation on a coin minted in A.D. 222 (*Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Röm. Abteil.*, vol. 16 (1901), pl. XII, n° 7) and a coin of the next emperor, Alexander Severus, with the text *Iovi Ultori* (H. Cohen, *op. cit.*, IV, p. 114, n° 102).

Jupiter Optimus Maximus. This revolutionary classification made the reorganization of the cult unprecedented. For practical purposes the emperor coordinated all the cults of the Roman *imperium* and made them all subordinate to his sun god. This meant the complete identification of all the ancient national gods of Rome and others from all parts of the Empire, after which all of these deities, like the servants of a powerful lord, were made subservient to *Sol Invictus Elagabal* [1]. To give significant expression to this state of affairs, he had the symbols of the main cults brought to the *Elagabalium* on the Palatine, including the 'Eternal Fire of Vesta', the stone of the Magna Mater, the *Palladium*, the sacred shields of the *Salii*, the sacred stones of the temple of Diana at Laodicea. He also commanded that the cults of the Jews and the Samaritans, even that of the Christians, also be represented, so that the priests of *Sol Invictus Elagabal* would come to know the secrets of all religions [2].

c) *The priests of Sol Invictus Elagabal*

Since Elagabalus wished his reformation to succeed, it was not sufficient merely to announce a few rulings concerning the supremacy of Sol Invictus Elagabal and to built two splendid temples. Externals were not enough; a more lasting effect was required, and this he attained by instituting a college of *sacerdotes*. This college of priests was highly effective in conducting the cult of Sol Invictus under the leadership of the *sacerdos amplissimus*, who was none other than the emperor himself.

It was already been mentioned that a college had been active in Rome for several years. Even the names of some of its members are

[1] *Historia Augusta, Vita Heliogabali*, 7, 4: *Omnes sane deos sui dei ministros esse aiebat*; Herodianus, V, 5, 7; Dio Cassius, LXXIX, 11, 2; T. Optendrenk, *op. cit.*, pp. 41 f.

[2] *Historia Augusta, Vita Heliogabali*, 3, 4-5: *Sed ubi primum ingressus est Urbem, omissis iis quae in provincia gerebantur, Heliogabalum in Palatio monte iuxta aedes imperatoris consecravit, eique templum fecit, studens et Matris typum, et Vestae ignem, et Palladium, et ancilia, et omnia Romanis veneranda in illud transferre templum et id agens ne quis Romae deus nisi Heliogabalus coleretur. Dicebat praeterea Iudaeorum et Samaritanorum religiones, et Christianam devotionem illuc transferendam, ut omnium culturarum secretum Heliogabali sacerdotium teneret*; T. Optendrenk, *op. cit.*, pp. 45 f. and 60 f.; K. Bihlmeyer, *Die Syrische Kaiser in Rom (A.D. 211-235) und das Christentum*, Rottenburg 1916, pp. 58-60.

known: Titus Iulius Balbillus and Aurelius Iulius Balbillus. Its priests had probably acquitted themselves as well as possible in their prominent function under a favourably disposed imperial administration under the Severi, but now for the first time the college enjoyed all the advantages of official appointment and support. Nonetheless, no further details about this college can be found for the latter period, either; not even the number of members or its organization are mentioned in the surviving sources [1]. Nothing is known about the conditions the candidates had to satisfy in order to be admitted to the college, nor about their function in the services of the Invicible Sun God. We know only that there were no internal hierarchical relationships or degrees of initiation as in the closely related cult of Persian Mithras.

The college was headed by the emperor himself, under the title, new in Rome, of *sacerdos amplissisimus* [2] or *summus sacerdos* [3]— according to some sources even *invictus sacerdos* [4]. This title was elevated above that of *pontifex maximus* [5], and, in official documents was always placed before any other [6].

Elagabalus was the *sacra cognoscens* [7] of the cult and was initiated into the mysteries, about which very little is known with any certainty. Apparently, such initiation was not general, since it cost Elagabalus' grandmother, Julia Maesa, considerable effort to induce the emperor to acquaint his cousin Alexander with everything that a *sacerdos Dei Solis Invicti* had to know.

[1] *CIL* VI, 717: *Soli Invicto, M. Aemilius, M. M. L. Chrysantus, magister anni primi et M. Limbricius Polides, decuriales eius sodalicii, de suis dedicaverunt*; J. Gagé. *op. cit.*, pp. 319 f.

[2] *CIL* VI, 3839: ... *Imperatoris Caesaris Marci Aureli Antonini, pii felicis augusti, pontificis maximi, sacerdotis amplissimi, Lucius Iulius Aurelius Hermogenes* ....; *Revue Archéologique*, 1936, p. 276, n° 85: *Imperator Caesar Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, pius felix augustus, consul III, pater patriae, sacerdos amplissimus et Marcus Aurelius Alexander Caesar*... .

[3] H. Cohen, *op. cit.*, IV, p. 350, n° 276: *Summus sacerdos Augustus.*

[4] *ibid.*, p. 330, n° 64: *Invictus sacerdos Augustus sacra cognoscens.*

[5] Herodianus, V, 57; *Historia Augusta, Vita Heliogabali*, 34.

[6] *CIL* X, 5827: *Honori Imperatoris Marci Aurelii Antonini, pii felicis augusti, sacerdotis amplissimi Invicti Solis Elagabali, pontificis maximi, tribunicia potestate* ...; *CIL* XI, 3774, *cf.* p. 71, note 3; *CIL* III, p. 1997, *cf.* p. 71, note 4.

[7] H. Cohen, *op. cit.*, IV, p. 330, n° 64 (see above, note 4).

There is a third member of the college whose name we know, in addition to the two mentioned above, since it appears on an inscription, namely Verus [1]. A *basis exigua* found in the Transtiberim district of Rome permits the conclusion that this Verus, priest of Sol Invictus, dedicated the figure of an eagle to his god. The pedestal probably supported this figure, which has been lost. A dedication of this kind was normal, seeing that the eagle also played a special role in the cult and dogma of Sol Invictus [2].

Eudemon, a freedman, showed his gratitude to Titus Julius Balbillus, as his *patronus optimus*, by an epigraphic dedication [3]. This priest, therefore, was no nonentity, since he was honoured as protector. For the *libertus*, such an expression of gratitude was an occasion to commemorate his patron by all his titles, but here and in other surviving epigraphic texts concerning him, he carries only the title of *sacerdos Solis Elagabali*. It may therefore be concluded that this Balbillus had no other important function and was fully occupied with the cult of Sol Invictus Elagabal.

The afore-mentioned Verus was also a *sacerdos Solis Invicti*. Unfortunately, no exact date can be identified, although the epigraphic text provides sufficient indications to make it likely that he was in office during or after the reign of Elagabalus. That the Syrian sun god is referred to here cannot be doubted. The inscription does not occur in the collection of the Mithraic dedications compiled by F. Cumont. Furthermore, a priest or initiate of the mysteries of the Persian Mithras cult scarcely carried the title of *sacerdos Solis Invicti*. Nor can it refer to the ancient Sol, because the epithet *invictus* seems to have been of recent introduction. Nor can the sun god referred to here have been the Sol of the religious reformation of Aurelian fifty years after Elagabalus, since the servants of that cult were *pontifices*. Moreover, Verus was also a priest of Liber Pater, since his complete title was *sacerdos Liberi Patris item Solis Invicti*. Liber Pater was the ancient god of the group to which Jupiter belonged and was later identified with Bacchus.

[1] *Ephemeris Epigraphica*, IX, 730: *Dis Manibus, Verus sacerdos Liberi Patris item Solis Invicti, donum aeternum Baebiae Bernae, matri ... fecit.*

[2] *CIL* VI, 708: *Aquilam Soli Alagabalo Iulius Balbillus.*

[3] *CIL* VI, 2269 (see above, p. 53, note 2).

d) *The dogma*

The body of beliefs subscribed to by the followers of *Sol Invictus Elagabal* cannot be described in detail. The available sources provide no direct information whatsoever, and we are therefore restricted to what we can infer from similarities with related religions, especially the analogous cult of Mithras, and a few data yielded by our own research.

The first and the most striking impression obtained from a study of this cult of the sun god, in addition to the pronounced tendency toward monotheism, is that it cannot have been an innovation exclusively attributable to the efforts of the young emperor. The complex of mysteries of *Sol Invictus Elagabal*, the philosophical basis, and the plans for accomplishing this dominance of the sun god, could not possibly have been the work of the young priest alone. On the contrary, it is evident that it must have been the result of long preparation, nourished and led by the ecclesiastical college of the Syrian sun god at Emesa, whose perspicacity and prestige had been increased by prolonged study. At the beginning of the third century A.D., the college of *sacerdotes* at Emesa had already existed for a century. The high priests of Emesa were prominent and powerful figures who had long played an important role not only in religious but also in political matters. Under their leadership the members of the college had become a powerful priesthood. Their formulation of the dogma of Sol Invictus Elagabal was impressive, and enabled them to exert a steady influence on the lives of the people.

When, in A.D. 218, Elagabalus ascended the throne of the Empire and chose to be addressed thencefore only by the name of his deity, he had but one more step to take to complete the well-considered plan of the priests, and as emperor there was nothing to keep him from having this last phase of the plan put into execution. No high priest of *Sol Invictus Elagabal* had ever had circumstances so much in his favour. From the religious point of view, the course of the evolution could not have been more felicitous, and politically, nothing more advantageous could have been expected.

There had been a considerable evolution in the dogma of the Syrian sun god, and it had been enriched by elements taken from

other, related, religions. Northern Syria was pre-eminently the region in which the goddess Astartè (Aphrodite-Urania) was worshipped in a special way [1]. In neighbouring Arabia, where Baal was worshipped as the sun god, a female deity was worshipped as Athena. These deities were similar or related to the Sol Invictus of Emesa. Many teachings of Mithraism also had noticeable influence on this evolving religion.

The romans were already acquainted with this religion, which had long been propagated in the capital of the Empire and had made a place for Iupiter Optimus Maximus Dolichenus, the Baal of Syria, as well as for other gods from the surrounding regions [2]. But it remains difficult to determine what the *sacerdotes* in Rome and elsewhere taught the followers of *Sol Invictus Elagabal.* The meagre indications are provided only by the representations on coins or monuments, showing some aspect of the ritual, and the even scarcer details given by historians [3].

The basic features of this religion comprise pure monotheism, the promise of bliss in another life, intense religious experience and strange, tumultuous celebrations. All this explains its exceptional power over the emotions, since these elements almost completely satisfied the religious longings of the Romans of this period. Formerly, religion had been a family duty or an affair of state. The sacrifices were performed by the *pater familias* or by a political personality sometimes supported by a qualified priest. But now the serving of the god had become a private matter. The soul of the devotee craved for the deity, in whom he hoped to find perfect happiness. This supreme joy had long before been displaced to a realm outside the material world. Religion had become more vital, more intense, more mysterious. The god was adored with great fervour, and many devoted themselves entirely to his service.

[1] Herodianus, 5, 6, 4; A. von Domaszewski, *Die politische Bedeutung der Religion von Emesa,* in *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft,* XI (1908), p. 225.

[2] A. von Domaszewski, *op. cit.*, p. 235.

[3] The cult as such has not been explicitly discussed anywhere, but a few data are to be found *passim* in two works of F. Cumont, *Les mystères de Mithra,* Brussels 1913³, and *Études Syriennes,* Paris 1917; as well as in M. J. Vermaseren, *De Mithrasdienst in Rome,* Nijmegen 1951, and *Mithras, De geheimzinnige god,* Amsterdam 1959; and T. Optendrenk, *Die Religionspolitik des Kaisers Elagabal im Spiegel der Historia Augusta,* Bonn 1969.

Among the populace, an ill-defined belief in another life had persisted, but under the influence of this and analogous religions this belief had become stronger and more specific. Nevertheless, the "believers" had only a vague idea of the joy awaiting them in the hereafter. The dogma of the cult of Sol Invictus did much to define the bliss reserved for his votaries.

However, the cult of *Sol Invictus Elagabal* has not survived through the centuries by a wide variety of sculptures or archeological reliefs, as was the case for the many and sometimes very well preserved *mithraea* or *spelea* of Mithraism. The cult also failed to become the subject of passionate controversies among scholars, as was Mithraism. From the few data that can be collected on *Sol Invictus Elagabal*, it appears that, to his followers, this sun god was not so much an abstract supernatural god as a supreme being incarnated in the daily presence of the solar sphere. The fact that the dogma arose in Syria, where astrology was a part of daily life, suggests this conclusion. The fact that the altar had to be placed in a well-defined direction is explained by the requirements of the dogma [1]. This direction could not be chosen arbitrarily; it was determined by the place at which the sun rose on an equally specific day. This is entirely logical, since the deity visualized by the votaries was identified with the sun.

To his followers, *Sol Invictus Elagabal* was the unconquerable deity who seemed to be forced, each evening, to submit to the powers of darkness with which he did battle at dark, but who each morning reappeared as the inimitable victor. This power to conquer was extended by *Sol Invictus Elagabal* to his adherents, not only to ensure their victory on the field of battle or in the daily battle of life but also to help his worshippers triumph over the powers of evil, the bad spirits, at every moment in their lives but especially at the critical moment of death. In this way the votaries were to be led by him who always triumphed over darkness, into the eternal light [2].

[1] *Bulletin Archéologique*, 1931, p. 399, n° 5: *Deo Soli ortum constitutum per C. Iulium Aelurionem, centurionem legionis III Augustae Antoninianae, praepositum Numeri Hemesenorum.*

[2] F. Cumont, *Études Syriennes*, p. 68.

But the sun god himself did not communicate directly with his followers. The eagle, the Syrian sun bird, acted as servant and messenger [1]. It was the eagle that carried the souls to their destination, at least those which had undergone the necessary purification. The eagle thus played a prominent part in the cult of *Sol Invictus Elagabal,* and was frequently represented together with its master, the sun god. A marble altar found in Rome in the *regio Transtiberina* carries an image of Sol Invictus borne by an eagle [2]. One of the priests of the god, T. Iulius Balbillus, dedicated an *aquila* to him [3]. The eagle, or else a chariot drawn by four horses, carried the souls to the next world. The souls of the emperors could attain this eternal bliss most easily, because their lives were spent in close communion with the sun deity. The titles emperors adopted and used on their coins provide adequate evidence on this point. They set their subjects the proper example of the requisite cleansing or abstention. Elagabalus, for instance, the depraved voluptuary who was the slave of his passions, refused to eat pork [4], because this abstention was a means of purification. He even planned to have himself castrated, a remarkable contrast to his habitual excesses [5]. This permits the conclusion that the cult knew ecstatic moments in which the devotees also practised similar rites. In this the cult of *Sol Invictus Elagabal* was not alone; similar practices are known for the cults of Cybele and Attis.

Drawn by the example of their emperor and *sacerdos amplissimus,* the faithful devotees, and ordinary mortals as well, began to regulate their way of life according to the doctrine of their faith. Their souls, thereby bound to Sol Invictus by a strong mystical bond, would thus be carried to the supreme bliss of being near their god through the mediation of the eagle at the proper time, that is after death.

[1] The eagle is usually shown on coins together with the conical stone or the anthropomorphized sun god. Cf. H. Cohen, *op. cit.*, IV, pp. 325-350; Mionnet, *op. cit.*, V, p. 227, n° 592 ff.; F. Cumont, *Études Syriennes*, p. 57.

[2] *CIL* VI, 710.

[3] *CIL* VI, 708.

[4] This probably concerns an influence of Mithraism or Judaism; cf. Heroadinus, V, 6.

[5] Dio Cassius, LXXIX, 11, 2; *Historia Augusta, Vita Heliogabali*, 7, 1-2; T. Optendrenk, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

The promulgation of the precepts to be followed by the devotees in purification rites and other religious acts led to the introduction in the city of Rome of practices that could only be offensive to any respectable inhabitant of the capital [1]. To abstain from eating pork was a means of cleansing away a defilement; if the support of the sun god in daily life and transport to the invincible sun god by the chariot or the bird of the sun were to be assured, it was imperative to have a clean, purified soul. Many votaries circumcized themselves or cast their amputated sexual organs into the temples as was apparently done in other Eastern religions [2]. The greatese repugnance, however, was evoked by the sacrifices of young children [3], not the ugly or deformed but the most beautiful; not the children of lower-class citizens, but those of the highest functionaries and dignitaries of Rome [4]. Such practices could not fail to invite opposition.

The sun god, Sol Invictus, was invoked on a variety of occasions. He was the omniscient revealer of all concealed things. The epigraphic dedications available convey the most disparate appeals. The sun god was asked to revenge the murder of a twenty year old woman [5]. This usage or custom of appealing to the sun god as avenger appears to have taken root in Rome at the same time as the Eastern cults [6]. Sol Invictus was also invoked for the recovery of health and even for the obtaining of an honorary function. It was therefore a matter of course for many legions to ascribe their victories to the special intervention of Sol Invictus [7]; had not the

[1] J. Réville, *op. cit.*, pp. 245 f.

[2] *ibid.*, passim; Lucianus, *De Dea Syria*, 47 and 49; E. Movers, *Die Phoenizier*, I, pp. 678-689; T. Optendrenk, *op. cit.*, pp. 30 f.; F. Cumont, *Les Religions orientales*, p. 189; *Historia Augusta, Vita Heliogabali*, 7, 2.

[3] Representation of Emperor Elagabalus in woman's clothing holding a small naked boy in his hands, in F. Studniczka, *Elagabal*, in *Archäologische-Epigraphische Mitteilungen aus Oesterreich-Ungarn*, V (1884), p. 69, pl. 1; T. Optendrenk, *op. cit.*, pp. 65 f.

[4] F. Lenormant, *Elagabalus*, in *DS* II, pp. 521-531.

[5] *CIL* VI, 14099: *Soli tibi commendo qui manus intulit ei*; F. Cumont, in *Revue des Études grecques*, 1904, p. 330, an unpublished epitaph (transcribed by M. Anderson at Tchuruk near Zela) begins: "Ἥλιε, ἐκδίκησον".

[6] F. Cumont, *ibid.*, "The idea that the sun god reveals hidden crimes belongs to the astrological doctrines".

[7] *A.E.*, 1910, n° 133: *Pro salute et Victoria Germaniae Imperatoris ... Deo Patrio Elagabalo ... milites Hemenesi ..*, dating from A.D. 214.

legions in Syria, partly as a result of the influence of the cult of Emesa, acclaimed Elagabalus emperor? An inscription to this effect has been found in Brigetio (Pannonia Superior) [1]. Dedications and expressions of gratitude to the sun god Elagabal were made by individuals of every class and position [2]. The doctrine of *Sol Invictus Elagabal* had now penetrated everywhere.

e) *The ritual*

Emperor Elagabalus, the crowned high priest of Sol Invictus, sacrificed to the sun god every morning. During these daily rites, for which he stood in front of the altar, presumably in a particular attitude and facing in a particular direction, the *amplissimus sacerdos* wore typically Syrian robes ornamented with precious stones. His face was decorated with red and his eyes were made up. Accompanied by a group of women who danced and struck music from strange instruments, he proceeded from the imperial palace to the *Elagabalium*, around which the various altars had been placed in readiness. He made the round of the altars, performing sacred dances as he went. It may be that he himself examined the entrails of the young children that had been sacrified, for he was pre-eminently the *sacra cognoscens* [3] of the mysteries of Sol Invictus and could therefore provide decisive elucidation and final pronouncement. He could function with complete assurance as augur, since he had had himself initiated into their mysteries whenever he had had the symbols of other deities transferred to the *Elagabalium* [4].

[1] *CIL* III, 4300: *Deo Soli Alagabalo Ammudati, milites legionis I Adiutricis bis Piae Fidelis Constantis* ...; T. Optendrenk, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

[2] *CIL* III, 1955: *Deo Invicto pro salute et incolumitate Pamphili, dispensatoris Augustorum nostrorum, Fortunatus arcarius*, an inscription placed by a treasurer, Fortunatus, for the prosperity of the imperial steward, found at Salona in Dalmatia, on a pedestal supporting a statue of the sun god. *CIL* V, 3278: *Soli L. Cassius, Luci libertus, Ianuarius votum solvit* ... from a liberated man from Verona. *CIL* III, 3478: *Deo Invicto, Cornelius Abascantus, libertus Corneli Paulli, primipilus legionis II Adiutricis, votum solvit libens merito. CIL* VIII, 2350: *Soli Augusto sacrum, Valerius Carpus, augustalis, decurionatus* ....

[3] H. Cohen, *op. cit.*, IV, p. 330, n° 64: *Invictus Sacerdos Augustus, sacra cognoscens.*

[4] A. Bouché-Leclerq, *Les pontifes de l'ancienne Rome*, Rome-Paris 1871, pp. 378 f.

After his initiation into the secrets of the cult of the *Magna Mater*, he underwent the baptism by blood of the *taurobolium*, which he exploited as a means of obtaining the symbol of the goddess as well as the other symbols of the Phrygian religion [1].

The sacrifices made by the Emperor in this manner usually consisted of hecatombs of sheep and bulls, libations of rare perfumes and excellent old wines, mixed with the blood of the sacrificial animals. The presence of the Roman senators, the order of *equites*, and the highest state functionaries, was required at these sacrifices; and on these occasions they too had to wear Syrian robes. A Syrian carnival in the capital city of Rome [2]! Military commanders and the highest officials, dressed in Syrian fashion and shod in linen, might consider themselves fortunate to bear on their heads the golden vessels containing incense and the entrails of the victims [3]. The emperor laboured under the delusion that he did them a great honour by allowing them to assist in the rites of his deity.

It has already been mentioned that the young high priest had an inner urge, perhaps inspired by a certain aspect of his cult, to exhibit himself on all occasions with certain specifically female external features and to play a female part as often as possible. His mainly silken Eastern dress was worn in a feminine way; the make-up on his face and around his eyes, though not necessarily feminine, contributed greatly to the effect he wished to make. It must also be kept in mind that in his performance of the sacred rites he was continually surrounded by a group of clamorous women who danced around him and accompanied him with music.

All these effects were intensified on the great festival of *Sol Invictus Elagabal* in the middle of the summer, between June and September [4]. The *Vita Heliogabali* [5] gives us the significant

[1] *Historia Augusta, Vita Heliogabali*, 7: *Matris etiam deum sacra accepit, et tauroboliatus est ut typum eriperet et alia sacra quae penitus habentur condita*; T. Optendrenk, *op. cit.*, pp. 29 f.

[2] J. Réville, *op. cit.*, pp. 243 f.

[3] Herodianus, V, 5, 10.

[4] J. G. Frazer, *Adonis, Attis and Osiris*, London-New York 1906, p. 7. The representation of the conical stone appears on Elagabalus' coins dating from or after 221 A.D., i.e. towards the end of his reign (M. Thirion, *Les monnaies d'Élagabale*, Brussels 1968). A similar procession must also have been held in Syria in honour of Adonis and Attis (points of contact with the

information that the main festival of Sol Invictus was celebrated in the summer season. On this occasion the symbol of the sun god was carried in an elaborate procession from the *Elagabalium* to the temple in the lower city *ad Spem Veterem*. Whatever the degree of reliability assigned to the historian who wrote this biography, it must be admitted that this detail is accurate, since it is epigraphically confirmed by an inscription found in Rome containing the words *proficiscentes expeditionibus sacris* [1]. The inscription unquestionably dates from the reign of Elagabalus, after the adoption of his cousin Alexander A.D. 221-222, since the latter is called by the title *nobilissimus Caesar*. The expression itself leaves no room for doubt, except perhaps that *expeditio*, used in this special meaning of procession may seem unusual. However, the nature of the procession and the circumstances under which it took place certainly justify the use of the term *expeditio*; which evokes the impression that the participants were on foot and accompanied by soldiers. This is in complete agreement with the reports of the biographer and other historians, including Herodian [2]. The entire phrase *proficiscentes expeditionibus sacris* adequately renders the religious concept. The participants were on foot in large numbers. Only the symbol of Sol Invictus, the conical stone, was drawn from the first temple to the other on a magnificant chariot, as frequently shown on the coins of Elagabalus and described by his biographers.

The chariot was accompanied not only by citizens of every rank but also by troops who joined the sacred procession as such not as individuals. This is confirmed by the inscription in question, which was dedicated by three representatives of the praetorian cohort in the procession, namely, Marcianus Masculinius, a centurion, Aurelius Fabianus, a standard-bearer (*signifer*), and Valens Firmius,

cult of the Magna Mater-Cybele). The reading *proficiscentes expeditionibus sacris* (see note 1, below) probably refers to this procession, which was certainly not held after the murder of Elagabalus in March, A.D. 222.

[5] *Historia Augusta, Vita Heliogabali*, 8.

[1] *CIL* VI, 323: *Herculi Invicto, pro salute Dominorum nostrorum Imperatoris Caesaris Marci Aurelii Antonini, ... et Marci Aurelii Alexandri, nobilissimi Caesaris..., quod proficiscentes expeditionibus sacris voverant, regressi cum commanipulis, libentes votum solverunt.*

[2] Herodianus, V, 5 and 6.

an *optio centurionis*. That this dedication is to Hercules Invictus does not modify the meaning of *proficiscentes expeditionibus sacris*. This is not the only case in which the emperor or his deeds were honoured in a dedication to a god other than *Sol Invictus Elagabal*. Numerous epigraphic texts and dedications have been found with similar dedications to Hercules, Jupiter Optimus Maximus, Victoria Aeterna, Sarapis, and others [1]. There is even an altar dedicated to Hercules in commemoration of the occasion of the emperor's arrival in Rome A.D. 219, after his formal acclamation as emperor in June 218, despite the fact that the report of his religious reorganization had reached Rome long before [2]. It is even less unexpected because Hercules had long been considered to be the *comes* of the *imperator*, especially since Commodus, and had already received the epithet *Invictus* in the republican period. Although Hercules is specifically Roman, the epithet *Invictus* surrounds him at this time with an Eastern aura [3]. Indeed, it was mainly the special deities of the East, such as Mithras, Elagabal, and Sarapis, who were given the epithet *Invictus*. With the growth of their influence it became customary in Rome to apply it to the best-loved gods in the Roman pantheon. In the present case, *Hercules Invictus* very successfully conjures up the idea of Sol Invictus.

At the head of the procession came the images and symbols surrounded by a small army of horsemen and people on foot [4]. The gods were represented by their symbols, like body-guards who preceded their lord and master Elagabal. Both gods and humans have to make way for the primary deity of the Empire. The black conical stone lay on an ornamented chariot drawn by four white horses and was surrounded by precious stones and flagons filled with perfumes. The emperor-priest permitted no one to take place on the chariot nor did he do so himself, so that the deity, shaded by fans or an image of the eagle with wide-spread wings, seemed to be driving the horses [5]. Elagabalus, robed in the vestments of the

[1] *CIL* VI, 570; *CIL* III, 14341; *CIL* III, 6161; *CIL* III, 14561.
[2] *CIL* VI, 31162.
[3] J. Gagé, *op. cit.*, pp. 237 f.
[4] Herodianus, V, 5 and 6; *Historia Augusta, Vita Heliogabali*, 7-8.
[5] A study of the coins shows that two types occur, one with the eagle with open wings, the other with four fans, according to Eastern convention (cf.

sacerdos amplissimus, led the procession. Walking backwards, he held the reins of the sacred chariot in his hands. Two slaves guided him, since it was essential that he did not take his eyes off the god, even for an instant. The multitude followed, carrying torches and strewing flowers and garlands, and the entire road from the *Elagabalium* to the second temple was strewn with gold-dust [1].

As soon as the huge procession had arrived at its destination, the customary sacrifices were performed with the usual brilliant ceremonies. The blood of the victims flowed copiously, and large amounts of perfume and wine were poured over the offerings. But for the Roman people this ritual must have been only incidental. With eager anticipation they awaited the popular diversions appointed to follow the sacrifices. The emperor then climbed the high towers erected for the purpose on the square in front of the temple, and from there threw all kinds of gifts to the crowd, valuable gold and silver objects, clothing, many kinds of cloth, even small animals, both tame and wild, for which the crowd fought in indescribable confusion. After this, Elagabalus presented the populace with games, theatricals, races, banquets, in short all the favourite forms of entertainment of the Roman populace.

During the reign of Elagabalus, this supreme feast of Sol Invictus was the main event of the year, not only because this sun god was the foremost deity of the Empire but also because the Emperor willed it so. The old Roman deities and the gods introduced from conquered territories of course continued to be worshipped with the usual rites. The older festivities retained their familiar appeal; all that had happened was that in the long series ot religious festivals a new date had been inserted, and on this date, with the usual imperial generosity where the populace was concerned, magnificent celebrations provided the *panem et circenses* which had become so necessary.

H. Cohen, *op. cit.*, IV, pp. 325 to 350 passim; A. Mongez, *Iconographie romaine*, II, 3, p. 188, pl. LI, 3; M. Thirion, *op. cit.*, passim).

[1] Herodianus, V, 6; *Historia Augusta, Vita Heliogabali*, 8. *CIL* VI, 3721, may contain an allusion to this procession, the mass of torches and flares. This usage at the annual procession was perhaps summarized by someone in the emperor's vicinity as: *Inventori lucis Soli Invicto Augusto.*

4. The theogamy of Sol Invictus Elagabal

a) *The theogamy with Minerva*

The marriage of Elagabalus to Julia Cornelia Paula early in his reign did not last long [1]. Late in A.D. 220 or at the beginning of 221, he divorced her. Shortly after, he brought the rage of all Rome down on his head by taking as his second wife Aquilia Severa, a Vestal virgin [2]. This choice may serve as an illustration of the importance of the cult of Vesta in Rome at that time.

Elagabalus had realized that his cult of the sun had not penetrated as deeply into the inner life of the Romans as he had wished. Superficially and officially, Sol Invictus was the paramount deity, but the cult had not gained predominance to the extent desired. The Roman populace had been aroused, and great festivities in honour of the foremost deity of the Empire were held repeatedly —their only interest was in "bread and circuses"—but the people were not convinced of the absolute and superior divinity of *Sol Invictus Elagabal.*

The emperor hoped to influence this undesirable state of affairs in a sense favourable to himself by uniting his cult with the honoured cult of Vesta, and thought he could accomplish this by a marriage between himself and a priestess of Vesta, since he himself was the high priest of *Sol Invictus Elagabal* [3]. His reason for chosing a priestess as wife is clarified by the explanation given by Dio Cassius [4]. According to this author, the high priest had expressed the explicit wish to see children worthy of *Sol Invictus Elagabal* born of this marriage. The reason why the emperor chose a priestess is not

[1] She seems to have had little importance at court; her coins are also unimpressive; cf. H. Cohen, *op. cit.*, IV, p. 325, n° 4-18.

[2] Dio Cassius, LXXIX, 9, 3-4.

[3] The date of this marriage cannot be established with any certainty, but must have been after August 29th 220 or even after October of that year, because coins of Cornelia Paula as empress from this period have been found (*cf. British Museum Cat. Alex.*, p. 196, n° 1529, 1533). The distribution of money to the populace early in A.D. 221 apparently on the occasion of the second marriage, and the citation in Dio Cassius (LXXIX, 9, 4) that Aquilia Severa was empress only briefly, can be taken as the basis for a hypothesis placing the date of the marriage at the beginning of A.D. 221 (See dedication text, p. 73, note 1).

[4] Dio Cassius, LXXIX, 9, 4.

hard to find. The cult of Vesta was one of the most favoured of Roman Paganism [1]. In Emesa, the cult of *Sol Invictus Elagabal* had gradually adopted related elements; for instance, the goddess Astartè from northern Syria, together with the female principle concretely projected as Athena, had had a certain amount of influence on the dogma. Elagabalus had included the worship of both these feminine elements in the cult. Astartè became Juno Caelestis. The *palladium* of the temple of Vesta, which in Roman theology was sacrosanct, became the incarnation of the goddess Athena [2].

It is clear why, for this divine marriage between Sol Invictus and Vesta, the emperor chose the symbol of the goddess Athena, the *palladium*, as a vivid expression of the new situation. The temple of Vesta in Rome contained no symbol or image of this goddess but rather one of Minerva-Athena [3]. Elagabalus, who was accustomed to seeing a symbol of his god in his temple as visual evidence of his presence, took the *palladium*, which he regarded as a symbol of Vesta, out of the temple of Vesta and united Vesta and Sol Invictus in a "holy marriage" [4].

In the East, priests and priestesses personified the deity whom they served. The emperor regarded himself as such a personification and Aquilia Severa the priestess as the personification of Vesta. The two most noteworthy deities of the time, Sol Invictus Elagabal and Vesta-Minerva were, together with their consecrated servants, joined in marriage at about the same time.

This was the greatest folly that Elagabalus could have committed. His open violation of all that Rome had held holy for centuries could not fail to provoke anger endangering both his religious reformation and his rule. For the first time, the opposition solidified, and propertied Romans, offended in their devotion to *Romanitas*, made funds available to incite a military revolt [5]. After long arguments and using her irresistible powers of persuasion, the wily Julia Maesa

[1] E. Preuner, *Hestia-Vesta*, p. 441; K. Latte, *Römische Religionsgeschichte*, Munich 1960, p. 108 ff.

[2] A. von Domaszewski, *Die politische Bedeutung der Religion von Emesa*, p. 226.

[3] G. Fougères, '*Minerva*', in *DS*, III², p. 1929.

[4] Herodianus, V, 6, 7.

[5] Dio Cassius, LXXIX, 4, 6.

and her advisers managed to persuade the young emperor to dissolve his marriage with Aquilia Severa [1] and remove the *palladium* from its undesirable and far too prominent position [2].

b) *The theogamy with Dea Caelestis*

All this was hardly favourable for the realization of the imperial plans, and was partially due to the emperor's lack of insight into the mentality of the Romans. Instead of giving up his plans, however, he continued to push them through even more obstinately than before.

The imperial family had already encountered many obstacles, but the greatest of these was the absence of ties with the Roman *nobilitas*. To remove this impediment, Elagabalus decided on a third marriage, this time to Annia Faustina. To eliminate any difficulties that might arise from the divine marriage between *Sol Invictus Elagabal* and *Vesta-Minerva*, he also made arrangements in this period for a second theogamy. His choice fell on the Carthaginian goddess Dea Caelestis, whose image was brought to Rome with great display and placed in the *Elagabalium* on the Palatine. There, with special ceremonies, she was joined in theogamy with *Sol Invictus Elagabal* [3]. This choice gave evidence of greater wisdom and caution, and also satisfied the requirements of the situation completely, so that with it Elagabalus crowned his work of reform.

Dea Caelestis

Dea Caelestis had been known and worshipped at Rome for centuries before these events. She was familiar as the queen of the heavens, Virgo Caelestis or Venus Caelestis [4], and was not only the foremost goddess of Carthage but also reigned throughout North

[1] *ibid.*, 9,4 and Herodianus, V, 6,5. Both confirm the brevity of Aquilia Severa's period as empress. The exact date of the divorce cannot be determined with certainty, but must have been before August 28th A.D. 221, because after that coins of Annia Faustina were struck; *cf. British Museum Cat., Alex.*, p. 198, n° 1549.

[2] Herodianus, V, 6, 8.

[3] Dio Cassius, LXXIX, 12, 1; Herodianus, V, 6, 8-12.

[4] After the third Punic War, Scipio had attempted to win over the goddess Caelestis to his cause by *evocatio*, and then carried her to Rome with due ceremony. Cf. Servius, *ad Aen.*, XII, V, 841; Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, III, 9, 7-8. Also K. Latte, *op. cit.*, pp. 345 f.; F. J. Dölger, *Die Himmelskönigin von Karthago*, in *Antike und Christentum* I, 1929, pp. 97-98.

Africa and the Mediterranean region. This is shown by the many epigraphic texts found throughout this region. To honour Dea Caelestis, theatrical games were held [1] and the *ferula*, a ceremony of the nature of the *dies lavationis* of the Magna Mater, was celebrated. *Taurobolia* were also offered to Dea Caelestis [2].

The oracle of the Carthaginian *hieron*, which had been consulted ever since Antonius by every proconsul on assuming his function in the province, often gave replies that kindled political passions [3]. Pertinax, for instance as proconsul of Africa, had to put down revolts caused by the *carmina* of Caelestis [4].

The cult of this goddess was entrusted to a college composed of priests and priestesses together with two lower ranks, the *sacrati* and *canistrarii* [5]. In this sodality there was also a hierarchy headed by the *princeps sacerdotium Deae Caelestis* [6], and there were even priests of first and second rank [7]. The *sacrati Caelestis* were mendicant priests, like those of Juno at Hierapolis and of Astartè at Citium [8]. The attendants of the temple included women as well as men; they participated in the sacrifices and were admitted to all the functions and priesthoods. Epigraphic texts of both priests and priestesses have survived [9].

[1] H. Frère, *Sur le culte de Caelestis*, in *Revue Archéologique*, 1907, pp. 21 f.

[2] As early as A.D. 134, cf. *CIL* X, 1596: *Lucio Iulio Urso Servanio consule III, Nonis octobribus ecitium taurobolium Veneris Caelestae et pantelium Herennia Fortunata imperio Deae per Titum Claudium Felicem, sacerdotem iterata est.* Cf. R. Duthoy, *The Taurobolium*, Leiden, 1969.

[3] *Historia Augusta, Vita Macrini*, 3; H. Frère, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

[4] *Historia Augusta, Vita Pertinacis*, 4.

[5] *CIL* VI, 37170 ends with the usual formula of dedications made by sodalitates. To the list of priests, the lesser attendants are added, *una cum sacratis et canistrariis. Année Epigraphique*, 1907, 245, gives the list (*album*) of the members of the college: *Caelesti Augustae sacrum, pro salute Domini nostri Carini Augusti Publius Sittius Optatus, eques romanus, et Octavio Emeritus et Caecilius Frumentus, sacerdotes, Centrius, Abundius, Grasisius, Felix Restutus, Sirisinnus, Terentius, Fortunatus, Extricatus, Canistrarii, et Communis, Silvanus, Donatus, Vincentius, Fructus, Vitalis, Felix, sacrati, de suo fecerunt.*

[6] *CIL* VI, 2242: *Dis Manibus Gai Vari Apolausti, principis sacerdotium Deae Caelestis, qui vixit . . . .*

[7] *Revue Archéologique*, 1907, p. 25, note 5: *Dis Manibus. Publius Iulius, Publi filius, Quirinus Martialis Publianus, sacerdos Caelestis Sittiane loci primi vixit . . . .*

[8] Augustin, *Civitas Dei*, II, 26.

[9] *CIL* II, 4310: T. Avidius Primulus; *CIL* X, 1596: T. Claudius Felix;

Nothing is known about the manner in which the priests were admitted, by *adlectio* or *cooptatio*, for how long they served, what formalities had to be fulfilled or what conditions they had to satisfy for promotion in the hierarchic system. In all likelihood the headship of this college, the *princeps sacerdotium Deae Caelestis*, was not a family privilege as in the case of the cult of *Sol Invictus Elagabal*, since one inscription is known in which the son of a priest of Dea Caelestis has no sacerdotal title [1]. The members of the lower orders, the *canistrari*, both men and women [2], carried the consecrated baskets, *canistra*, in which the offerings and the instruments used for the sacrifices were placed. The name *sacrati* indicates that the attendants of this cult also had to undergo an initiation.

In Rome and throughout the Empire, the cult of Deae Caelestis had become very popular, as is shown by the many dedications specifically addressed to her [3], especially since Septimius Severus accorded her particular reverence, and the later identification of Julia Domna with the Carthaginian goddess. Dedications by families [4],

CIL VI, 2242: C. Varius Apolaustus; *Eph. Ep.*, V, 1264: C. Ortius Cornelius Luciscus; *CIL* VIII, 4673: C. Licinius Cronha; *CIL* VIII, 4674: Cocceius Cronha; *CIL* VIII, 1360: Rubrius Rogatus Belalitanus; *Année Epigraphique*, 1906, n° 16: Annius Istrugi; *ibid.*, 1906, n° 122: L. Magnius Felix Remmianus; *ibid.*, 1907, n° 245: P. Sittius Optatus, Octavius Emeritus, Caecilius Frumentus; *ibid.*, 1917/18, n° 62: Iulius Donatianus; *Bulletin Archéologique*, 1894, p. 246: Gidius Felix, Primi filius; *Année Epigraphique*, 1957, p. 80, n° 276: Rubrius Rogatus Bellalitanus.

As priestesses: *CIL* VI, 37170: Flavia Epicharis, Sectia Olympias and Chrestina Dorcadius; *Bulletin Archéologique*, 1893, p. 200, n° 2: Porcia Venaria; *ibid.*, 1898, p. 223, n° 86: Veturia Martha, etc.

[1] *CIL* II, 4310: *Dis Manibus. Gaio Avidio Primulo, sacerdoti Caelestis incomparibili religionis eius, Gaius Avidius Vitalis patri, bene merenti*".

[2] *CIL* VI, 37170: *Flaviae Epicharidi, sacerdotiae Deae Virginis Caelestis, praesentissimo Numini loci montis Tarpei, Sextia Olympias, honorofica femina et Chrestina Dorcadius, honorifica femina, honorificae feminae, coniugi Iuni Hyle, sacerdotis, una cum sacratis et canistrariis dignissimae.*

[3] *CIL* VIII, 993; *CIL* VIII, 1837: *Caelesti Augustae sacrum, Lucius Furfanius Maximus votum solvit*; *CIL* VIII, 2226: *Caelesti, Saturno, Mercurio, Fortunae, Diis Iuvantibus, Lucius Octavius Felix, decurio cohortis Hispanorum, ex beneficiario legati, tempore votum solvit*; K. Latte, *op. cit.*, p. 347; I. Mundle, *Dea Caelestis in der Religionspolitik des Septimius Severus und der Julia Domna* in *Historia* 10 (1961) p. 228-237.

[4] *CIL* VIII, 8432: *Caelesti Augustae sacrum Umbria Pomitia et Pompeius Floridus, filius eius, animo libentes votum solverunt*; *Année Epigraphique*, 1903, n° 355: *Dominae Caelesti, pro salute Imperatorum Aureli Antonini et*

municipia [1], *coloni* [2], and *pagus* [3] indicate that the celestial goddess from North Africa had many votaries in many places.

For her followers, this goddess had a dual nature. As queen of the heavens she directed the motions of the moon and the stars, controlled thunder and lightning, and sent the beneficent rains down to the earth; as personification and deification of the productive natural forces, she was goddess of fertility. As such, she was identified with Cybele in Africa and with the Bona Dea in Italy [4].

The theogamy

The sacred marriage of *Sol Invictus Elagabal* to the Dea Caelestis did much to give the cult of the sun god the desired popularity. This was, after all, the emperor's objective in arranging this second divine marriage.

The immense popularity of this goddess, as reflected by the great variety of formulae used to invoke her, was not the only factor governing the emperor's choice [5]. As her cult flourished, her temple at Carthage, which had remained the centre of the cult, filled with treasure. Because of his accurate appreciation of her nature and no less because of an urgent need to supplement his pecuniary resources, Elagabalus had the symbol of the Dea Caelestis brought to Rome with every mark of homage. The theogamy was then celebrated in the *Elagabalium* with great display [6]. The treasures of

Marci Aureli Commodi Augustorum ... Lucius Aemilius Calpurnianus Muse et Mucia Pudentilla eius ob honorem Luci Aemili Muciani et Quinti Aemili Augurini, quondam filiorum piisimorum, dedicaverunt.

[1] *CIL* VIII, 2591: *Caelesti sacrum, Respublica Lambaesianorum, decreto decurionum pecunia publica*; *Année Epigraphique*, 1899, n° 111: *Caelesti Augustae sacrum civitas ... Suc...*

[2] *CIL* VIII, 16411: *Caelesti Augustae sacrum pro salute Imperatoris Caesaris .... totiusque domus eius divinae, coloni fundi ... aedem fecerunt cum columnis ornatis idemque dedicaverunt.*

[3] *Année Epigraphique*: 1895; n° 28: *Caelesti Augustae sacrum, arcum .... pagus Thacensium fecit, decreto decurionum ....*

[4] F. Cumont, *Bona Dea* in *RE* III, p. 1249.

[5] *CIL* II, 2570 and *CIL* III, 993: Caelestis Augusta; *CIL* VIII, 999: Diana Caelestis; *CIL* VIII, 993: Plotina Caelestis Dea and Thoraca Caelestis Augusta; *CIL* VIII, 1424: Juno Caelestis; *CIL* VIII, 9796: Dea Magna Virgo Caelestis; *CIL* VIII, 10955: Caelestis Regina; *Année Epigraphique*, 1915, n° 80: Dea Caelestis.

[6] P. Jordan, *Römische Mythologie*, II, p. 401.

the temple of Carthage also crossed the Mediterranean, to serve as dowry [1].

Once again, the same celebrations and excesses took place as those that occured during the annual procession in honour of Sol Invictus. Again there were bloody offerings, again the senators and knights stood in their silken robes to watch the sacred dances of the young emperor surrounded by women of dubious character. For Romans who still retained even a slight sense of dignity, such debauchery could only represent the height of inhumanity; but what seemed scandalous to men like the historian Dio Cassius and others, was holy to the inhabitants of Emesa or Hierapolis [2]. Just as in Rome all the gods accompanied Sol Invictus Elagabal on his triumphant procession through the city, so many gods were similarly grouped around the goddess of Hierapolis during the great celebrations of the spring-time. Just as, to the astonishment of the Romans, Elagabalus imprisoned lions, apes and serpents in the temple of his god, so did all kinds of wild animals inhabit the forecourt of the temple of Dea Syria. By abstaining from pork, circumcising himself and casting into the *Elagabalium* the sexual organs of those whom he had had mutilated, he repeated in Rome what occured frequently in his native country. If he sacrificed children to his god, at Hierapolis the most fervent adherents among the faithful hurled their own children down into the open space in front of the temple. The innumerable excesses of Elagabalus, which historians have seen as an expression of mental derangement or insanity, were nothing but the practice of certain Syrian customs on a scale made possible by his imperial power.

It was a religious madness. The strong wine of his priesthood had gone to his head. He had as little respect for human as for divine laws that were not dictated by his own capricious will. No woman ever had any real influence on him, dominated as he was by his priestly monomania. The only woman with whom he ever came to an understanding was Julia Soaemias, his mother [3], and the only

[1] Herodianus, V, 6, 11.

[2] The same thing is found for the cult of Dea Syria, cf. J. Réville, *La religion à Rome sous les Sévères*, p. 243 and passim; Lucianus, *De Dea Syria*, 47 and 49.

[3] *CIL* X, 6569; *Bulletin Archéologique*, 1928, p. 93, n° 2: *Pro salute et*

one who was sometimes able to bend him to her will was his grandmother, Julia Maesa [1], to whom he had given entire responsibility for state affairs so that he could devote himself exclusively to his religious function and his pleasures. His grandmother was clever enough to represent everything she wished to accomplish as being profitable for him; in anything to do with morals his mother was no better than he [2]. Julia Maesa presided over the Senate [3], watched over the interests of the family, and provided whenever possible for the enormous expenditure of her grandson. She had very early seen that he would turn out badly, and therefore planned in good time to prepare the way for her other grandson, Alexianus, the emperor's cousin. To achieve this she had to approach the emperor by working on his vulnerability. With increasing frequency she accompanied him to the temple of Sol Invictus Elagabal to sing the sacred hymns, and finally, she was able to persuade him to adopt Alexianus on condition that he be initiated into the mysteries.

5. A CULT ADOPTION

As a result of the theogamy of Sol Invictus with Dea Caelestis, Elagabalus' downfall was briefly averted. In these precarious circumstances the wily Maesa had realized that if she was to avoid seeing the ruin of her entire family she would have to create a more important position for Alexianus (called Alexander after his adoption), who until then had only been a supernumerary in the background. To this end she devoted herself to making Alexander popular with the people and the troops.

It has already been shown that Julia Maesa had succeeded in convincing the emperor that the burden of serving his god and performing his imperial functions was too heavy, and that he could lighten the load by adopting his cousin, the son of Julia Mammaea

victoriis et aeternitate Imperatoris Caesaris Marci Aurelii Antonini, pii felicis augusti, atque incolumitate Iuliae Soaemiadis augustae, matris eius . . . . .

[1] *CIL* X, 6002: *Iuliae Maesae Augustae, aviae Imperatoris Caesaris Marci Aureli Antonini* . . . .

[2] Herodianus, V, 3; *Historia Augusta, Vita Heliogabali*, 2.

[3] *Historia Augusta, Vita Heliogabali*, 12; *CIL* XIII, 6671: *Iuliae Augustae Caelesti Deae matri Imperatoris Caesaris M. Aureli Antonini, pii felicis augusti, Parthici maximi, Britannici maximi, Germanici maximi, itemque senatus, Patriae et castrorum in honorem legionis XXII Antoninianae* . . .

the sister of Soaemias, and making him responsible for public affairs [1]. This would place Alexander in a position to come into contact with many prominent Romans who could then be able to judge his person and conduct on their merits.

There was reason to respect Alexander. The judicious and carefully directed training he had received from his mother had had a strong influence on him. In contrast to what her sister had been to the young Elagabalus—a companion who set him an example in debauchery and encouraged salacious talk, as the pride she took in the gossip about her former relations with Caracalla shows—Mammaea was a conscientious mother. She confuted all the current insinuations, which involved her, too. For Alexander she was a mother in the true sense of the word, and made sure that he received the best possible education from the best Graeco-Roman teachers. All this gave Alexander the best chance of an auspicious future.

The emperor, persuaded by the clever reasoning of Julia Maesa, had the adoption ceremony take place in the Senate, and his cousin received the title of Caesar [2]. The exact date of the adoption cannot be determined, but it most probably took place at the end of May or the beginning of June, A.D. 221. An inscription dating from the 1st of June A.D. 221, reads *Imperatoribus Antonino et Alexandro*... [3]. The adoption must therefore have already occurred, or was to occur shortly thereafter. On the 10th of July A.D. 221, Alexander was made one of the *Antoniniani* [4], and on the 13th of July he was appointed *supra numerum* of the *sacerdotes in aede Iovis Propugnatoris* [5]. From then on, the name of the emperor

[1] Herodianus, V, 7, 3.

[2] Herodianus, V, 7, 3; *CIL* VI, 2999: *Imperatore M. Aurelio Antonino et Alexandro Caesare Augustis*...; S. Dušanic, *Severus Alexander as Elagalus associate* in *Historia* XIII (1964), p. 495.

[3] *CIL* VI, 3069: *Imperatoribus Antonino et Alexandro, Grato et Seleuco consulibus, Kalendis Iuni, Celius Saturninus sebaciaria fecit, stipendiorum III, Celso, adiutore centurionis, optione Gargilio, sub tribuno Sereniano, centurione Patroilo feliciter felici.*

[4] *CIL* VI, 2001: *Grato et Seleuco consulibus anno post Romam conditam DCCCCLXXIII a.d. VI Idus Iulias in aede divi pii et divae Faustinae ex senatus consulto Marcum Aurelium Alexandrum nobissilinum Caesarem, supra numerum cooptaverunt.*

[5] *CIL* VI, 2009: *Grato et Seleuco consulibus, anno post Romam conditam DCCCCLXXIII, III Idus Iulias, in Palatio in aede Iovis Propugnatoris, ex*

and that of his adopted son appeared together on official documents [1].

After Caesar Alexander had been adopted, his initiation into the mysteries of Sol Invictus was stipulated in Elagabalus' will, which ensured his succession to religious as well as political power. This phase in the life of the young Alexander was of decisive importance in forming his attitude toward religious matters after he acceded to the throne. Before his adoption he had attracted little notice; now he began to acquire a public image. As yet, he had had no role in religion or in the cult of Sol Invictus. He had consistently maintained the greatest reserve with respect to the external expression of his cousin's feelings. Alexander had felt no need up to that time to become more closely acquainted with the import of the duties attendant upon the cult of Sol Invictus, and in this attitude he was especially encouraged by his mother. But his grandmother, Julia Maesa, was able to persuade Julia Mammaea, her son Alexander, and finally even Elagabalus himself, of the necessity for the young heir apparent being initiated into the mysteries of the cult of Sol Invictus after adoption, and he was given the necessary training.

Thus, Alexander gradually came to some extent under the influence of the cult of Sol Invictus, which—especially in view of his extreme youth—had initially had little importance for him. But his ideas were not as extreme as those of his cousin, the emperor and high priest. The religious preparation and training of this Caesar only went far enough to make him aware of the necessity of giving form and content to the rather poorly defined ideas of those Romans who had accepted syncretism.

This attitude toward Elagabalus and the cult of Sol Invictus led to the clash with the emperor that threatened to, and finally did become fatal for the latter, and also represented the essence of his

senatus consulto Marcum Aurelium Alexandrum nobilissimum Caesarem, supra numerum cooptaverunt.

[1] *CIL* VI, 323; *CIL* VII, 585: *Imperator Caesar M. Aurelius Antoninus,... summus sacerdos Dei Solis Elagabali, pontifex maximus, ... et M. Aurelius Alexander nobilissimus Caesar imperii heres...*; *CIL* VI, 570: *Serapi sacrum, Imperator Caesar Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, augustus pius felix, consul IIII, pater patriae. Restitutum Idibus Aprilibus. Imperatore Caesare Antonino pio IIII et Marco Aurelio Alexandro consulibus.*

religious thinking and plans at the time when he took sole control of the empire. He too wished to impose syncretism, as will soon be made clear, but in a completely different way to that of Elagabalus. The emperor wished to make all other gods subservient to Sol Invictus Elagabal: Alexander eliminated rivalry and opposition among the adherents of the other gods by giving them all equal importance and by urging each of them to embrace the same well-disposed acceptance.

The adoption yielded Alexander much more than just a religious education. The immediate, more practical result, which was entirely consistent with Julia Maesa's plans, was that he was in a better position to reap the benefits arising from his engaging character and his determination to be Roman, when it came to winning the hearts of the Romans. But the adoption, which was, after all, intended to calm the situation and put an end to the hostility toward the emperor, itself contained the seed of a revival of the difficulties. Caesar Alexander wanted to be more than just an instrument of reconciliation; he also wished to take reconciliatory and purifying action himself. The unworthy supporters of Elagabalus were censured and gradually their excessive fanaticism became impossible [1]. This led to the first signs of friction. But the real difficulties began when Elagabalus realized that his cousin was not going to undergo initiation into the mysteries with uncritical acceptance. Alexander's cautious nature and the experience he had acquired during the last two years had led him to form his own ideas about religious policies, and in these ideas his mother supported him. He did not have the least desire to complete the preparation for the priesthood in the service of Sol Invictus, as the emperor expected of him, and he declined the honour. The young heir to the imperial throne chose to be trained in the traditional Roman way of life [2]. This refusal increased the emperor's suspicion and fury, the more because he had discovered that his cousin had become more popular with the troops and the people than himself [3]. From then on, the emperor ceased to show any sign of friendship or kindness

[1] *Historia Augusta, Vita Heliogabali*, 12.
[2] Herodianus, V, 7, 9.
[3] Dio Cassius, LXXIX, 19, 1.

toward Alexander, and even attempted to deny him the title of Caesar. He wrote a letter to this effect to the Senate, but the Senate did not reply. He then had Alexander removed from Rome, and spread the story that he had been murdered. A revolt immediately broke out in the army, and only the appearance of the hastely recalled Alexander in the camp of the praetorian cohorts restored the situation. The grandmother, Julia Maesa, lost no time in deserting Elagabalus and taking the side of Alexander and his mother, Julia Mammaea [1].

It soon became evident that the troops would bargain before showing their allegiance. They demanded that the emperor dismiss his unworthy companions, and he had no option but to capitulate, making an exception only for Hierocles, the favourite among his favourites. This did not put an end to the rivalry between the cousins, for the soldiers condemned their emperor more strongly than ever for not completely satisfying their demands. Elagabalus then thought he could conciliate them by sharing the consulate for 222 with his cousin [2].

6. The end of Elagabalus; the damnatio memoriae

The fact that, from A.D. 222 onwards Elagabalus was willing to share the consulate with his cousin, was not enough to mollify the

[1] Dio Cassius, 19, 4: Herodianus, V, 8, 7.

[2] In the preceding year the emperor had shared the consulate with Oclatinius Adventus 218 (*CIL* VI, 2001, p. 69, note 1); with Q. Tineus Sacerdos II in 219 (*CIL* VI, 865); with M. Valerius Comazon II in 220 (*CIL* VI, 866); in 221 Gratus and Seleucus shared the consulate (*CIL* VI, 2009, see p. 97, notes 4 and 5); in 221 it was the two cousins (*CIL* VI, 570, see p. 98, note 1). Alexander's exact position is still a matter for controversy. According to P. Groebe (*Alexander*, in *RE*, II, p. 2529), he was joined emperor; this opinion is based on a military diploma (*CIL* XVI, 141 dating between A.D. 221 in July and March A.D. 222, = *CIL* III, p. 892) with the following text: *Imperator Caesar, divi Antonini Magni filius, divi Severi pii nepos, Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, pius felix augustus, sacerdos amplissimus et invictus Dei Solis Elagabali, pontifex maximus, tribunicia potestate V, consul IIII, pater patriae et Imperator Caesar, Marci Aureli Antonini filius, divi Antonini Magni nepos, divi Severi pii pronepos, Marcus Aurelius Alexander, pius felix augustus, ...*; he therefore shared imperial power. T. Mommsen also held this opinion (*CIL* III, p. 892) because Alexander was given the title of *Imperator Caesar*, but later modified it when a diploma dating from A.D. 246 also carrying the name Caesar was found (*CIL* III, p. 2000, d. LXXXXIX). The title *Imperator Caesar* seems to have been given to Caesars several times in the course of the third century.

Romans and praetorians, whose hate and disgust were too deeply rooted to respond to such a superficial gesture. The difficulties flared up again almost immediately; and in the beginning of March, A.D. 222, a new revolt broke out, this time with consequences fatal for Elagabalus. The direct cause of this uprising is not clear. According to Dio Cassius [1], it was a disagreement between the mothers of the two youths. Herodian attributed it to the emperor's order for the arrest of all those who supported Alexander [2]. These two versions are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Julia Mammaea had already been plotting for some time against Elagabalus in her son's favour, and an open break was inevitable, whether it occurred sooner or later. The troops naturally chose the side of Alexander when they discovered Elagabalus' plans and realized that they could only end in the murder of their favourite. They even went so far as to want Alexander to become emperor, even if that meant killing Elagabalus. As was later to occur repeatedly, the interval between the expression of the troops' wishes and their realization was made as short as possible. The emperor recognized the imminent danger to himself from the fact that his orders for the arrest of Alexander's main supporters had been ignored. He attempted to flee for his life, but did not succeed. On the 21st of March, A.D. 222, he was surprised in the gardens of the imperial palace and murdered, together with his mother, Julia Soaemias, and his most ardent supporters, including Aurelius Eubulus and Fulvius Dioganianus [3]. The murder of Elagabalus was the fatal consequence of the feeling he himself had provoked in Rome by his profligate habits and especially by his anti-Roman

[1] Dio Cassius, LXXIX, 20, 1.

[2] Herodianus, V, 8, 15-16.

[3] Dio Cassius, LXXIX, 20, 2; P. Groebe, *Alexander* in *RE*, II, P. 2529; Salzer, *Die Syrischen Kaiser*, I, p. 42, n° 157. With respect to the date these authors accept Dio Cassius. In the *Chronicle ad annum* 354 his rule is given as lasting VI years, VIII months, and XXVIII days. According to M. Rubensohn, *Zur Chronologie des Kaisers Severus Alexander*, in *Hermes*, 25 (1890), pp. 340 f., there was a confusion between VI and III for the year and one unit was missing in VIII, which should have been VIIII. Dio Cassius counts from the 8th of June A.D. 218, and therefore gives 11-12 March 222; the chronicle counts from May 26th and therefore gives 14 March 222 as the date of the murder; K. Grosz, *Elagabal* in *RAC* IV, p. 990.

actions. In the person of Alexander Severus, the empire came into the hands of a ruler who was morally the opposite of Elagabalus. But it was not only because of his personality and moral qualities that the troops acclaimed him emperor. Once again, his grandmother Julia Maesa was working behind the scenes. She wished to continue to play a prominent part, and at any price. Just as four years earlier, after Julia Domna's death, she had stopped at nothing to win back the position she had lost by influencing the legions in Syria to place her grandson on the throne, she now lost no opportunity to turn the situation to her own advantage. In Julia Mammaea, the mother of Alexander, she found the suitable confederate to persuade the praetorians to murder Elagabalus. She saw no other means of protecting the young Alexander from the snares set by his cousin.

The bodies were beheaded, tied to a chariot, and dragged through the streets of Rome. After an unsuccessful attempt to throw them in a sewer, the bodies were cast into the Tiber. The loathsome behaviour of the young sensualist was a thing of the past; the new emperor showed himself to be a peaceable ruler and, even more important, committed to all that the Romans held most dear.

What was to be the fate of the cult of *Sol Invictus Elagabal* now that the high priest with his imperial power, was no longer there to protect it? With Elagabalus, the man who had flouted everything that was characteristically Roman, disappeared from Rome. In religious matters he had attempted, as emperor, for the first time in the religious history of Rome, to place an Eastern sun god above the old *di indigites*, and he had also attempted to force his religious reforms on the Empire. Only those who agreed with him on religious matters could obtain a high position; the others had not a chance of high office, since they were relieved of their functions even if they had managed to attain them. The course of events took a turn that the emperor had not expected, but those who claim that his plans failed totally and that the cult of *Sol Invictus Elagabal* died with him, except in Emesa, are too radical in their opinions [1].

[1] The authors who have treated this point are in agreement, and F. Lenormant (*Elagabalus*, in *DS*, II, pp. 529-531) seems to summarize their views: "Son culte paraît être assez restreint et exister principalement chez les légionnaires . . .". J. Réville, *op. cit.*, shares the same opinion.

The influence exerted by the cult of Sol Invictus had a deeper and more lasting effect than usually thought. We have already shown that the cult was known more than a half century before Elagabalus in Rome as well as elsewhere in the Empire. During his reign the cult was the most official in the Empire, and after he disappeared it continued to be maintained everywhere. In our opinion, the cult of the invincible sun god reached the height of its influence in the third and fourth centuries. The cult of Mithras, with whom *Sol Invictus Elagabal* is not infrequently confused for understandable reasons, began to lose ground after this period, and other Eastern cults in turn gained many adherents, mainly because they had predominant aspects incarnating the figure of *Sol Invictus Elagabal* of the third century.

Of the relatively rich epigraphic sources, few of the inscriptions dedicated to Sol Invictus can be adequately dated. A few of them belong to the period just after the murder of the emperor [1]. Although these texts provide only slight indications of the survival of the cult of Sol Invictus, arguments offering more certainty are available.

The cult of Dea Caelestis, which had reached Rome and taken root there long before, continued to be practised after Elagabalus' death and after his *damnatio memoriae*, which struck both the emperor and the cult. Since this Carthaginian goddess of the heavens was so closely connected with Sol Invictus after the theogamy, her cult could not but recall the memory of the cult of the sun god [2]. This may be the more easily assumed because the attempt of Elagabalus, however exaggerated, is an important indication of the mood of the Romans at the beginning of the third century. The tenets and influence of this Syrian cult were to a large extent responsible for the Roman interest in syncretism in this period. The theologians of Emesa had developed the dogmas of the

[1] *Corpus Inscriptionum Rhenarum*, 151 (dating from A.D. 223); *CIL* VI, 2821 (from A.D. 246); *CIL* III, 4300 (from A.D. 249); *Revue Archéologique*, 1934, p. 282, n° 197 (from A.D. 237); *Ephemeris Epigraphica*; IX, 1381 undoubtedly dates from the period after the emperor's murder.

[2] *Bolletino della Commissione archeologica di Roma*, 1909, p. 322: *Invicto Deo Soli omnipotenti, ... Caelesti, Numini praesenti, Fortunae, Laribus Tutelaeque sacrum, Publius Clodius Venerandus.*

cult to form a syncretic religion that was destined, by reason of its form and content, to become universal. In his attempt to achieve this purpose, Elagabalus chose to take up a position diametrically opposite to the eclecticism of Neo-Pythagorean philosophy; their objectives were much alike, but Elagabalus' method consisted of making other cults subservient to that of Sol Invictus. His purpose was consonant with the current religious evolution, and the syncretic concept fulfilled the demands of the times too well not to survive its unworthy representative and propagator [1]. The emperor, who acted or thought he acted only in the interests of his religion, visualized the cult of Sol Invictus as a universal religion, established by elevating his deity and bending elements of other cults to suit his purpose, i.e. by making them subordinate.

When he had the most important cult objects, such as the stone of the Magna Mater-Cybele, the *Palladium*, the fire of Vesta, and others, placed in the *Elagabalium*, this was not done with the intention of abolishing these cults [2], but rather to have the priests of Sol Invictus initiated into their mysteries; he himself, the emperor and high priest, set the example [3]. This was not merely fantasy on his part but an expression of the spirit of syncretism, a concomitant of his religious policies.

It is clear that the cult whose dogmas and ritual satisfied the aspirations of Paganism in every way and had been propagated and supported by imperial power for four long years could not disappear as the result of one murderous blow.

The Damnatio Memorae

Elagabalus had been murdered. It was now found necessary to obliterate him and his religious reforms by voting the *damnatio memoriae* for violating Roman customs and morals and provoking the disgust of influential citizens rather than for his attempts at

[1] L. Homo, *Les Empereurs Romains et le Christianisme*, Paris, 1931, p. 99.

[2] J. Réville, *op. cit.*, pp. 115 f.; *Historia Augusta, Vita Heliogabali*, 6 and 7: *.. nec Romanas tantum extinguere voluit religiones, sed per orbem terrae unum studens, ut Heliogabalus deus ubique coleretur*; T. Optendrenk, *op. cit.*, pp. 88 f.

[3] Emperor Elagabal had himself initiated into the mysteries of the Magna Mater, cf. *Historia Augusta, Vita Heliogabali*, 3 and 7.

religious reform [1]. Every effort was made to eliminate the memory of the emperor. He was refused a grave, and his relatives were forbidden to mourn him publicly. No statues or monuments, neither public nor private, were allowed in his honour, and those erected during his reign were either destroyed or, as in most cases, the name of Marcus Aurelius Antoninus was removed [2]. His relatives were not permitted to keep an image of him in their houses. The name and even the memory of the murdered emperor were to disappear from Rome and the Empire. The authorities entrusted with the execution of the *damnatio memoriae* knew very well that they would only be able to carry out the sentence completely if they included the life-work of the emperor, the cult of Sol Invictus.

Alexander Severus, who was acclaimed emperor immediately upon the death of his cousin, did not delay in erasing traces of the cult of *Sol Invictus Elagabal.* But the method he chose to apply contained the seed of the continued existence of the cult. He thought he was acting in accordance with the will of the Romans, and this was indeed the case for the most prominent among them. The symbol of the cult, the conical black stone, was sent back to Emesa. This offensive object, the cause of the fall of his predecessor, had to be removed if the new emperor was to give his rule a firm basis. This initial measure seems to constitute a definitive break with his predecessor's religious policies, but although this was his intention, Alexander Severus was soon to find that he had miscalculated. The preceding months had shown him the changes that had taken place in the attitude of the Roman populace, and his religious policies could only conform with what he had learned. For the time being he was forced to follow a course entirely against his inclination.

Reverting to the policy followed by Elagabalus, Alexander promoted syncretism. Under the influence of recent events, he made all gods equal. Sol Invictus was reduced to the level of the others, no more but no less. Alexander wished to effect the reconciliation of all the cults and their adherents. His attitude was honest and frank,

[1] Dio Cassius, LXXIX, 21,2; *Historia Augusta, Vita Heliogabali*, 34.

[2] The name was removed, for example, from the following epigraphic dedications: *CIL* III, 3637; *CIL* III, 3713; *CIL* III, 12214; *CIL* III, 14194; *CIL* VII, 664; *CIL* VIII, 10267; *CIL* VIII, 1024; *CIL* VIII, 2676; *CIL* XII, 4348; *CIL* XIV, 2257; *CIL* XIII, 6688; *Année Epigraphique*, 1966, p. 71, n° 262.

expressing tolerance without fanaticism. In the chapel of the imperial palace he collected, according to the account of his biographer [1], images of Apollonius of Tyana, Alexander the Great, Orpheus, Abraham, and Christ. This odd miscellany clearly reveals his intention: he wished to satisfy everyone. And indeed, the only ones who could not accept this solution were the Christians.

As we have said, the measures taken against the cult of Sol Invictus implied its continued existence. The return of the cult symbol to Emesa guaranteed its survival, and its influence and attraction would continue to radiate from its original source. Under the terms of the *damnatio memoriae* the stone might equally well have been destroyed or defaced, as was the fate of so many distinguished monuments, as a testimony against Sol Invictus Elagabal and his *sacerdos amplissimus*, but this was not done. What considerations restrained Alexander and his advisors, the most powerful man of their time, from implementing the decisive measure against this sun god? In our opinion, this was the only course open to them, because the cult of Sol Invictus had become firmly established in Rome and had so many adherents. Elagabalus was gone, but the votaries of the cult remained and with them the *sacerdotes* and the two beautiful temples. These temples were to be given a different function, but their association with the cult of Sol Invictus could not be erased. No matter how far-reaching and radical the consequences of the *damnatio memoriae*, the nucleus of the cult of Sol Invictus remained intact, even in Rome. In fact, Alexander never really intended to extirpate the cult of his native city and his own family. Even if this had been his plan, he could never have succeeded in doing so.

What Alexander Severus removed from Rome, was merely the symbol of the cult, rejected by many prominent Romans because its peculiar liturgy demanded more from them than they were prepared to give. Under his protection, the usurpers Uranius Antoninus and Sulpicius Antoninus settled in Emesa and, as they were distant relatives of Elagabalus, assumed the hereditary function of the priesthood [2]. Emesa's fame as a religious centre

[1] *Historia Augusta, Vita Alexandri Severi*, 29; L. Homo, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

[2] Dio Cassius, LXXIX, 21; F. Lenormant, *Elagabalus* in *DS*, pp. 530-531.

persisted. The *damnatio memoriae,* which was supposed to eliminate the influence of the cult of Sol Invictus [1], had no immediate practical consequences outside Rome, and certainly did not diminish the esteem in which the god was held in Emesa [2]. This city remained the celebrated place in which Sol Invictus continued to be worshipped well into a much later period and where the priestly family maintained the *sacerdotium* and held a certain amount of political power. The tenacity of the influence of the cult is shown by the fact that, fifty years later, Aurelian attributed his brillant victory over Queen Zenobia of Palmyra to the special intervention of *Sol Invictus Elagabal.* In Emesa he also found the conditions he required for the religious reforms he himself wished to carry out. Indeed, the cult of the sun had not entirely disappeared from Rome itself at the time when Aurelian established his syncretistic cult of Deus Sol Invictus in a special temple in the city, thereby crowning his work of unification.

The *damnatio memoriae* was not sufficient to effect the permanent disappearance from Rome of the cult of the invincible sun god, since, according to the biographer in the *Historia Augusta,* one of the temples of Sol Invictus was still in existence in the time of Constantine the Great and was still used for the rites of the cult, besides the temple built by Aurelian. There must certainly have been a marked reduction in activities connected with the cult directly after the murder of Elagabalus, but the cult gradually revived and its priesthood remained intact and continued to serve *Sol Invictus Elabagal.* No indication can be found that the *sacerdotes Solis Invicti* were also slaughtered or that their college was broken up, and dedications dating from after A.D. 223 have been found.

[1] The name of Sol Invictus was also chiseled off on monuments, e.g. *Ephemeris Epigraphica,* IX, 1381.

[2] *Historia Augusta, Vita Heliogabali,* 17; *ibid., Vita Aureliani,* 25, 4.

CHAPTER V

THE CONTINUATION OF THE CULT OF SOL INVICTUS

1. Traces in Rome

In addition to occasional epigraphic texts, dating from after the death of Elagabalus from which the time when the cult was established can be determined, there are others which, although they indisputably belong to the same period, cannot be dated precisely. They are, however, sufficiently numerous to demonstrate the continued existence of the cult.

In one of these texts, which was found in Rome [1], Sol is identified with Jupiter Optimus Maximus Dolichenus, the Syrian Baal worshipped especially at Dolichè in the kingdom of Commagene. After this country was conquered by Vespasian, the Baal was taken to Rome where a temple outside the *pomerium* on the Esquiline was dedicated to him as Jupiter Optimus Maximus Dolichenus. In the time of Elagabalus, worship of this deity was included in the cult of Sol Invictus. The two deities complemented each other, so it is not surprising for them to occur in the same dedication. In this connection, we may refer to a dedication to Sol Invictus by M. Ulpius Chresimus, a priest of Jupiter Dolichenus [2], addressed to the principal sun god of Syria for the safety of the emperor by whose mediation these two deities became so closely related.

Another inscription found in Rome with a dedication to Sol Invictus was offered by C. Ducenius Phoebus in gratitude for his freedom [3]. This inscription provides another indication that the simple dedication to "Sol" in this period concerned the Syrian sun

[1] *Ephemeris Epigraphica*, IV, n° 743: *Iovi Optimo Maximo Dolicheno et Soli sacrum.*

[2] *Bolletino della Commissione archeologica di Roma*, 1886, p. 101: *Soli Invicto pro salute imperatoris et Genio nostro, eques singularis eorum, Marcus Ulpius Chresimus, sacerdos Iovis Dolicheni, votum solvit.*

[3] *CIL* VI, 700: *Soli sacrum, Gaius Ducenius, Gai libertus, Phoebus, filius Zenonis, natus in Syria Nisibyn ..., liber factus Romae,...*

god, since a liberated slave thanked the national deity of his native land for his manumission. *Sol Invictus Elagabal* took care of the transient as well as of the eternal interests of his faithful followers. The important event that liberation was for a slave would certainly arouse feelings of gratitude. Not to a deity of lower rank—unless that deity had been appealed to as to a special protector—but to this particular god, whose name was spoken incessantly, who filled men's hearts and souls, the Invicible Sun God. This Syrian freedman had continued to practice his religion in Rome, and it would have been most helpful if the dedication could be dated more exactly. It dates either from the time prior to the formal establishment of the cult of Sol Invictus in Rome—which would explain the expression of gratitude to this sun god to some extent—or from the subsequent period, in which case there could be no doubt that the simple "Sol" referred to the Syrian Elagabal.

The dedication made by C. Julius Helius [1], who had his *signum "Ferrarius"* carved on an altar, presents us with a similar problem. Since this usage was not a Roman custom, at least not before the end of the second century [2], the sun god to whom this *arula marmorea* was dedicated can have been none other than Sol Invictus, and the inscription must in all probability date from the beginning of the third century. On either side of the text, a pitcher and plate are represented in relief; these objects were used daily by the priest of *Sol Invictus Elagabal.*

Another inscription [3], also impossible to date precisely, must also refer to *Sol Invictus Elagabal,* because of the description of the *tabella aenea* on which it appears. According to the text, it was dedicated to the originator of the light honouring Sol Invictus. This originator was Elagabalus or someone close to him who conceived the idea of surrounding the symbol of the sun god with a mass of light and torches, mainly during the annual procession when the conical stone was carried through the city on a chariot drawn by four white horses.

[1] *CIL* VI, 703: *Soli sacrum, Gaius Iulius Helius, ferrarius, voto suscepto, donum dedit.*

[2] R. Cagnat, *Cours d'Épigraphie latine,* Paris, 1914[4], pp. 55-56.

[3] *CIL* VI, 3721: *Inventori lucis Soli Invicto Augusto*; M. Guarducci, *Sol invictus augustus* in *Rendiconti Pontif. Acad.* XXX-XXXI, (1957-58), 161-169.

All this indicates that the cult of the invincible Sun God also persisted to a certain extent in Rome. Its dogmas certainly belonged to the time, with their general tendency toward monotheism and syncretism, a tendency shared by both the masses and Neo-Platonic philosophers. In principle, there was only one god; the traditional gods had all become mediators between that god and mankind.

In common with others, including that of Mithras, the cult of *Sol Invictus Elagabal* gave powerful support to the religious dogmas that saw monotheism as the ideal, and it continued to provide this support throughout the third century.

The religious reforms planned by Elagabalus were anything but a wavering flame that sank after four years and disappeared forever; it was rather a smouldering fire stirred from time to time by the later emperors of the third century, who included *invictus* among their titles with increasing frequency because they understood the emotional implication of the term.

2. The spread of the cult

If the places at which inscriptions to Sol Invictus have been found are marked on a map of the Roman Empire, it can be seen that his cult had spread throughout the empire, but only a little in the provinces of Gaul and Britain, in the West and in Asia Minor in the East, where a few of inscriptions dedicated to Sol Invictus have been found. The reason for these exceptions is difficult to determine. In the third century, which was a troubled period for Gaul, the conflict between the indigenous population and the Roman culture bearers must long have been a thing of the past. But each expression of Roman culture, the product of Hellenism and Eastern civilization, must have left its marks on the Gallic peoples. The mysteries deriving from Asia Minor, the cults from Persia and Syria, had given a new direction to the religious concepts of Rome, together with and through Hellenism, the influence of which had also taken effect outside the purely religious sphere. Soldiers from the Roman legions and occupying cohorts, merchants and teachers, to name but a few, had prepared the way for the Eastern cults, of which those of Mithras and Sol Invictus Elagabal were the most important, in every province of the Empire.

Nevertheless, a little trace of the cult of Sol Invictus Elagabal has been found in Britain, in contrast to an impressive series of dedications to Mithras [1], although it is possible that a few of these in fact refer to the Syrian sun god. That the cult of Sol Invictus had already spread along the Rhine into the northern part of the empire, to distant Germania, is shown by epigraphic evidence found in Traiectum and Vetera. In the southern part of the empire, from Olisipo (modern Lisbon) in Lusitania, and the northern coast of Africa in the east to Deir-el-Leben in Syria, Sol Invictus was known everywhere. the lack of traces in Gaul may mean only that Sol Invictus of Emesa was known there only superficially and sporadically, facilitating the disappearance of all traces of the cult. Indeed, Celtica, in the interior of Gaul, was only lightly occupied and its Romanization was repeatedly disturbed by the attacks of intruding barbarian tribes.

We have seen that the distribution of the cult was very wide. The number of epigraphic texts is well over the two hundred, which must be considered an important number in view of their unfortunate circumstance of the *damnatio memoriae*. Such circumstances did not affect, for instance, the cult of Mithras, whose subterranean *spelaea* or *mithraea* were destined by their nature to survive and many of which have been found virtually intact. But the temples of Sol Invictus provided building materials for other purposes if, indeed, any survived the destruction prescribed by the *damnatio memoriae*, which was, after all, intended specifically to wipe out all recollections of the emperor and his works.

Besides the centre of Emesa, the cradle of the cult, and Rome, its second capital, the following cities and localities may be mentioned as special sites of the cult on the basis of the number of inscriptions found there and the nature of the subjects bearing dedications: on the Natiso in the province of Venetia, Aquileia, Brixia in the province of Gallia Transpadana, Comum in the same province near the Lake Larius, Aquincum on the Danube in Pannonia Inferior, Brigetio in Pannonia Superior, Salonae in Dalmatia, especially Apulum in Dacia, Intercisa in Pannonia, Turres in Moesia; in the

[1] E. and J. R. Harris, *The Oriental Cults in Roman Britain*, Leiden 1965, pp. 1-50; with citations from M. J. Vermaseren, *CIMRM* I, 1956.

southern part of the Empire, Caesarea in Mauretania and in particular El-Kantara in Egypt. In addition to these places, many colonies of veterans—such as Colonia, Aquileia and Firmicum, which were centres of religious and social life for the legionaries during their period of military services—had important temples. In brief, after Rome and Latium, the provinces of Gallia Transpadana, the Rhine region, Venetia, Pannonia, and Dacia furnished the most material. Since the province of Dacia was virtually lost to the Roman Empire after Aurelian, i.e. after A.D. 275, it is logical to assume that the epigraphic texts found there date from the period before Aurelian and concern *Sol Invictus Elagabal* in so far as they were dedicated to the sun god and not to Mithras. This is actually known to be the case in the great majority of instances.

Apart from these data illustrating the distribution of the Sol cult, a list can be made of the *templa* dedicated to Sol Invictus. Besides the most important and ornate temple at Emesa itself, where the cult originated, there were of course the two large templesin Rome, the *Elagabalium* and the temple *Ad Spem Veterem* in the lower city.

Other temples are known from epigraphic evidence to have stood in Vettona [1], Comum [2], Intercisa [3], Apulum [4], Zwiefalten [5], and El-Kantara [6]. Their geographical distribution and the wide range of their founding dates testify to the importance of the cult.

Other inscriptions from the period following the murder of Elagabalus also demonstrate the distribution and the importance of the cult of Sol. In A.D. 223, a dedication was made to the sun god at Vetera during the reign of Alexander Severus, who succeeded his

[1] *CIL* XI, 5164: *Templum Deo Invicto Soli a solo Caesennius Tertullus restituit.*

[2] *Année Epigraphique*, 1914, n° 249: *Templum Dei Solis iussu DD NN Diocletiani et Maximiani Augustorum T. Flavius Postumus Titianus ... corrector Italiae, perfecit ac dedicavit ... .*

[3] *Ibid.*, 1910, n° 141: *Deo Soli Alagabalo pro salute Imperatorum ... miliaria Antoniniana Hemesenorum ... templum a solo extruxit.*

[4] *CIL* III, 1111: *Soli Invicto aedem restituit G. Caerellius Sabinus ....*

[5] *CIL* III, 5862: *Deo Soli Invicto templum a solo restituit Valerius Venustus ... praeses provinciae Raetiae, ... reditus sanitati ... .*

[6] *Bulletin Archéologique*, 1931, p. 401, n° 6: *Pro salute Dominorum Nostrorum Augustorum templum Dei Solis Invicti Iulius Draco ... restituit dedicavitque ...*

cousin a year before [1]. Although Elagabalus and his religious innovations had been anathematized, we nevertheless find here an inscription with a dedication to Sol by the troops of the XXXth legion, made through their commanders. Elagabalus, we remember, had made Sol Invictus the official guardian deity of the legions [2]. Admittedly, the epithet *invictus* was omitted in this inscription, probably as a matter of caution under the influence of the events of the preceeding year, and Sol is again associated with Luna according to the old Roman tradition. However, this precaution was taken only during a short transitional period; it was not long before *invictus* again occurred in the dedication formula, and this time permanently. A second dedication found in the same place at Vetera is to *Deus Sol Invictus* [3]. Formulated in this sequence, the dedication very probably concerns the sun god, whose cult had been reinstated by Aurelian.

In Puteoli a dedication was made to Sol Invictus as guardian deity of a colony [4]. At Tusculum an *ara Solis* was made for him [5]. On June 29th, A.D. 246, an *aedicula* was dedicated at Rome to the sun god together with other gods especially worshipped by the troops [6]. On one of the walls of the *aedicula* the sun god is shown as a youth garbed in a commander's *chlamys*.

Dating from the same period, the middle of the third century, there is a dedication to various gods, including Sol Invictus, by troops from the province of Belgica [7]. The *aedicula* carrying this inscription can also be dated fairly exactly, because it was founded by the same legionary, Firmius Maternianus of the Xth *cohors praetoriana*, who had also undertaken to maintain the other one. It

[1] *Corpus Inscriptionum Rhenarum*, 151.

[2] A. von Domaszewski, *Religion des römischen Heeres*, p. 60.

[3] *Corpus Inscriptionem Rhenarum*, 286: *In honorem domus divinae pro salute imperatoris Severi Alexandri Augusti Deo Apollini .. Lunae Solique deis, milites legionis XXX Valeriae Victricis Piae .....*

[4] *CIL* X, 1591: *Soli Invicto, Genio Coloniae, Claudius Aurelius Rufinus cum coniuge et filio donum dedit.*

[5] *CIL*, XIV, 2583.

[6] *CIL* VI, 2821: *Iovi Optimo Maximo et Marti et Nemesi et Soli et Victoriae et omnibus diis patriensibus, cives ex provincia Belgica Augusta Viromandorum .. Dedicatum III Kalendas Iulias Presente et Albino consulibus.*

[7] *CIL* VI, 2822: *Diis Sanctis Patriis, Iovi Optimo Maximo et Soli Invicto et Apollini, Mercurio, Dianae ex provincia Belgica milites .....*

is therefore obvious that *Sol Invictus Elagabal* is meant in both cases: the two inscriptions are complementary.

A fine large marble inscription found at Ostia has special interest as one of the few instances in which the relationship between Sol Invictus Elagabal and Dea Caelestis is indicated [1]. This inscription is to be dated during or after the reign of the young emperor.

At Traiectum in Germania Inferior, a syncretistic dedication to both Jupiter Optimus Maximus Summus Exsuperantissimus and Sol Invictus had been found. Here too, there can be no doubt that Sol Invictus refers to the Syrian sun god, since under this comprehensive nomenclature identifies Jupiter with the Syrian god of the heavens. The other gods mentioned in the dedication indicate its syncretistic intention [2].

The inscription found at Vettona (regio VI) [3] has already been mentioned. An adherent of the Invincible Sun God, Caesennius Tertullus, paid for the restoration of the temple of Deus Sol Invictus there. It is possible, however, that the sun god referred to here was the deity in whose favour Aurelian instituted his syncretic reforms.

For the sake of completeness, two further sites of the cult must be mentioned, in addition to the many places where epigraphic evidence of the sun cult has been found, namely, Aquincum in Pannonia Inferior and Apulum in Dacia. These are of especial importance both for the number of monuments excavated and for the nature of the texts. Here the cult of Sol Invictus seems to have had an exceptionally official character. This is the only conclusion to be drawn from the repeated occurrence of such expressions as *decreto senatus* and *pro bono communi* [4]. For the *decurio* of the colony at Aquincum an expression of gratitude was dedicated to the

[1] *Bolletino della Commissione archeologica di Roma*, 1909, p. 322: *Invicto Deo Soli omnipotenti ... Caelesti, Numini praesenti, ... sacrum ...*

[2] *Corpus Inscriptionum Rhenarum*, 55: *Iovi Optimo Maximo Summo Exsuperantissimo, Soli Invicto, Apollini, Lunae, Dianae, Fortunae, Marti, Victoriae, Paci .... legatus Augusti propraetore ....*

[3] *CIL* XI, 5164 (cf. p. 112, note 1).

[4] *CIL* III, 3475: *Decreto senatus Soli Invicto et pro bono communi*; *ibid.*, 10465: *Soli Invicto pro bono communi.*

sun god [1], and the *scriba* of the colony also thanked Deus Invictus [2].

Inscriptions from Apulum in Dacia have the same official character. A few of these indicate that Sol Invictus was a special guardian of the legio XIII Gemina, a legion which must frequently have been quartered in Apulum for long periods. Q. Caecilius Laetus, the imperial legate of the legion, fulfilled a vow to Sol Invictus there [3]. In doing so he adhered to tradition by making a dedication to *Sol Invictus Elagabal*, as his predecessor C. Caerellius Sabinus had done before the end of the second century [4]. A dedication confirming the official character of the cult also belongs to this series. Here C. Julius Valens made a dedication to Sol Invictus for the safety of the Roman people and the citizens of Apulum [5].

In Moesia, too, the cult of Sol Invictus continued to inspire his followers, as shown by an ex voto dedicated to him which was found on an altar erected in A.D. 237 [6].

From the variety of epigraphic texts mentioned thus far, we feel justified in concluding that the invincible god Elagabal must be distinguished from the Persian Mithras as well as from any other sun god. Sol Invictus had a place of his own in the religious life of the Romans and of the inhabitants of the *imperium*. The cult was able to hold this place from the middle of the second century onwards, especially after Aurelian had given it a new form and new life at the end of the third century. This individual position was made possible by the content of the dogmas, which attracted many

[1] *Année Épigraphique*, 1899, n° 69: *Invicto Deo sacrum, pro salute Gai Iuli Victorini, decurionis coloniae Aquincensium* . . . .

[2] *Ibid.*, n° 68: *Invicto Deo sacrum, Gaius Iulius Ingenus, scriba coloniae Aquincensium.*

[3] *CIL* III, 1013: *Soli Invicto, Q. Caecilius Laetus, legatus Augusti legionis XIII Geminae, votum libens solvit.*

[4] *CIL* III, 1111: *Soli Invicto, aedem restituit C. Caerellius Sabinus, legatus Augusti legionis XIII Geminae*; dating from A.D. 183-185.

[5] *CIL* III, 1114: *Soli Invicto pro salute imperii populique Romani et ordinis coloniae Apulensium C. Iulius Valens, haruspex coloniae supra scriptae et antistes huiusque loci, voto libens posuit.*

[6] *Revue Archéologique*, 1934, p. 282, n° 197: *Soli Invicto, Valerius Iucundus ex voto posuit, Perpetu et Corneliano consulibus.*

adherents, and the support of the emperors, who saw in these dogmas a fulfilment of the religious aspirations of their subjects as well as a means of enhancing the glory of the imperial crown.

3. Sol Invictus and the Legions

We have referred more than once to the close connection between the Roman legionaries and Sol Invictus. No other non-Roman cult, with the exception of Mithraism, was so widely accepted by the troops as this cult whose cradle lay in Emesa. Wherever epigraphic texts or monuments in honour of *Sol Invictus Elagabal* have been found, the legions played an important part in their dedication. Legionaries who had come into contact with Emesa during their period of service remained promulgators of the cult for the rest of their lives. They were responsible for the initial spread of the cult outside the borders of Syria, and the oldest datable inscriptions can be traced back to soldiers. The troops quartered around Emesa in A.D. 218 acclaimed the young high priest of the sun god as emperor. Even though his grandmother's money was decisive in the winning over of the troops, the influence of the religious centre of Emesa and the cult of Sol Invictus in this situation is not to be underestimated. The soldiers from Emesa, the *Hemeseni*, were always and everywhere propagandists for their national cult.

The other important Baal from Syria, more particularly from Dolichè, was worshipped at Rome as Jupiter Optimus Maximus Dolichenus in a temple on the Aventine, and was made the special protector of the *auxilia* by the same emperor [1].

With the carrying out of these measures, the establishment of the cult of Sol Invictus was complete. After its official elevation to the status of a national cult, Sol was officially made protector of the Roman legions [2]. It was inevitable that these legions would leave traces of their worship of Sol Invictus. The relatively large number of dedications found is evidence. Nevertheless, certain praetorian cohorts seem to have been the most active adherents, especially the tenth and first cohorts [3]. The imperial legates made many dedica-

[1] A. von Domaszweski, *Die Religion des römischen Heeres*, p. 59.

[2] A. von Domaszewski, *Die politische Bedeutung der Religion von Emesa*, p. 235, and *Die Religion des römischen Heeres*, p. 60 f.

[3] e.g. *CIL* VI, 2821 (cf. p. 113, note 6); ibid., 2822: ... *ex provincia Belgica*

tions under their own titles or in the name of the legion they commanded [1].

The motives underlying the dedications made by the soldiers and officers cannot always be identified. They were not usually mentioned, and the texts read only *Soli Invicto*. Where the motives were given, it is clear that they varied greatly: from important victories by their chief commander and emperor, or appointment to a higher rank to recovery from an illness. All these things were gratefully attributed to the unconquerable sun god who could influence daily events and kept watch over his faithful followers. This devotion to Sol Invictus was expressed by building a *pilus* or *aedicula* as well as in individual or collective contributions towards the restoration or building of a temple.

4. Sol Invictus Mithra and Sol Invictus Elagabal

One of the problems arising when studying the sun cult in the Roman Empire during the period of the emperors is the lack of agreement as to wether Sol Invictus Elagabal should be identified with Mithras [2]. Some authors, on the other hand, attach too little importance to the Syrian cult [3].

It is our opinion that a sharp distinction must be drawn between Elagabal and Mithras as solar deities.

Mithraism was brought to Rome and other parts of the Empire by soldiers and slaves, particularly during the second century A.D. from the Asiatic provinces [4]. Its dispersion was rapid, especially on the fringes of the Empire, along the *limes*. But the content and form of this originally Persian cult bore no resemblance to the religious ideas held by the Romans of this period. Mithraism of a distinct character, and its concepts were unfamiliar to the Romans.

milites, Iulius Iustus, miles cohortis I Praetoriae Piae Vindicis Philippianae ... Firmius Maternianus, miles cohortis X Praetoriae Piae Vindicis Philippianae, centurio Artemonis ...; cf. p. 113, note 7. See also *CIL* VI, 728, 710, 711.

[1] *CIL* III, 1111, (cf. p. 115, note 4); *CIL* III, 1013 (cf. p. 115, note 4); *CIL* III, 1118.

[2] As stated by P. Habel in his *Zur Geschichte des in Rom von den Kaisern Elagabalus und Aurelianus eingeführten Sonnenkultes*, pp. 95 f.

[3] F. Lenormant, *Elagabalus* in *DS*, II, p. 531.

[4] F. Cumont, *Les Mystères de Mithra*, Brussels, 1913[3]; M. J. Vermaseren, *Mithras, de geheimzinnige god*, Amsterdam, 1959.

Its rituals took place in subterranean caves, the *spelaea*. For the Romans, religion was purely a State matter. The State provided whatever was necessary for ceremonial display, and these ceremonies were held on fixed days to honour the official gods. The gods were worshipped in the name of the State and of the Roman people. The followers of Mithras, on the other hand, regarded religion as a private matter, and there was no State that provided for the maintenance or extension of the cult or for the celebration of official rites. The votaries of Mithras gathered in small communities, as can be seen from the limited dimensions of the *mithraea*. There was, however, a corresponding large number of *spelaea* [1]. Each community had its own hierarchy. The external form of the ritual and the tenets were so far removed from what might be called the established "church" of Rome that it is not difficult to conclude that Mithras was never officially included among the *di publici populi romani* [2]. It may be also be postulated that in the Hellenic or Roman world Mithraism was never an official cult despite the fact that its adherents included prominent magistrates and even emperors [3].

For the cult of Sol Invictus Elagabal, the situation was quite different. Superficially, this cult resembled the State cult of the Romans in many respects, among them the grandiose temples and the fact that the highest religious authority was in the hands of one individual who was usually a public official. From the moment of its arrival in Rome, the cult enjoyed a certain popularity. It reached its zenith during the rule of the young emperor Elagabalus (A.D. 218-222), when it was made the official cult of the entire empire. In order to consolidate the status of its priests and affirm it to the world, Elagabalus raised the function of *amplissimus sacerdos Dei Solis Invicti Elagabali* to a rank higher than that of *pontifex maximus*, and this exalted position was also enjoyed by the other *sacerdotes Dei Solis Elagabali*. The cult of the sun god Elagabal was official; it had already been established as such by the emperor when he had ordered an icon of himself as high priest sacrificing before the

[1] F. Cumont, *Textes et Monuments figurés relatifs aux mystères de Mithra*, Brussels, I-II, 1896-1898; M. J. Vermaseren, *CIMRM*, I-II, The Hague, 1956-1959.

[2] G. Wissowa, *Religion und Kultus der Römer*, pp. 89-90.

[3] F. Cumont, *Textes et Monuments*, I, p. 241.

symbol of the sun god to be sent ahead from Nicodemia to the Senate in Rome, commanding the Senators to hang it up in the *Curia* and pronounce the name of Sol Invictus before that of any other deity at every official religious ceremony. Under his leadership, the establishment of the cult of Sol Invictus Elagabal became an accomplished fact.

The cult of Sol Invictus Mithra was quite different in organisation and structure. The priests and initiates of the mysteries were divided into a strict hierarchy of seven grades. The highest grade was that of *pater patrum*; its holder was the leader of the religious community, gave it direction and instructions when the rites were held in the *mithraea* or *spelaea*, and had access to the *adyton*, the holy of holies. The cult of *Sol Invictus Elagabal* maintained no such hierarchy nor such distinctions between the various parts of the temple or cult site. Its simple hierarchy entailed only that the *amplissimus* or *summus sacerdos*, the emperor himself, assisted by the college of *sacerdotes*, had sole charge of the religious rites and sacrifices. The faithful were permitted to watch the rituals performed either at the circle of altars around the temple or within the temple itself. No other distinction was made.

In the sacred rituals in honour of Mithras, the State as such had no role. The *pater patrum* arranged everything. In the cult of Sol Invictus, everything was, so to speak, arranged and determined in the name of the State. It was the emperor himself who led the sacrifices, at which prominent Romans, civil servants, military men, and senators were required to be present [1]. All these functionaries did not always attend the religious ceremonies, but the emperor made it their moral duty, as representatives of their class, to be present at the blood sacrifices to *Sol Invictus Elagabal*. Elagabalus himself determined the course of events in honour of the god on the ceremonial festivals, the huge processions, and the celebrations in which the Roman plebs avidly participated.

The cult of Mithras was practised in the cave-temples, the secret chapels which could only hold a limited number of people. It has been estimated that the may *mithraea* excavated could hold an average of fifty to sixty worshippers. The religious ceremonies

[1] Herodianus, V, 5, 10.

honouring Elagabal were held in the superb temples concerning whose size and splendid ornamentation historians are in complete agreement [1]. The temples in Rome satisfied by their size and location, and satisfied every requirement that the emperor's Eastern love of luxury could contrive in the service of his god.

The obvious conclusion is that a distinction must be observed between the cult of Mithras and that of *Sol Invictus Elagabal.* The different locations of the rituals, the differences in the numbers and hierarchical status of the spectators and adherents, the basic differences in ritual and sacrifices, clearly show that these cults could not have been identical. This does not, of course, imply that there were no similarities between them. Both cults, which had developed under analogous cultural conditions, called their god Sol Invictus, the unconquerable sun god. The nomenclature is so similar that it is impossible to ascribe inscriptions reading *Sol Invictus* to one or the other with certainty unless Elagabal or Mithras are explicitly mentioned or their identity indicated by the context of the epigraphic text or the place in which it was found. It is therefore not correct to interpret all inscriptions reading *Sol Invictus* or *Deus Invictus* as applying to Mithras [2].

Up to a certain point, many elements of the two cults were common to both. This is true of the dogmas, especially in the imperial period. The attraction of the cult of Sol Invictus derives, to a great extent, from the same source as that of the cult of Mithras, which exercised a strong emotional influence by virtue of its complex symbolism, promises, and the purification its rites offered [3]. The followers of Mithras could be purified by baptism; they honoured the seventh day, the day of the sun, and celebrated the birth of their god on the 25th of December. Their special virtues were abstinence and self-control. They believed in the existence of a heaven for the pure and a hell for the sinful, and also in the

[1] Herodianus, V, 6, 7; Dio Cassius, LXXIX, 12, 1; Zonaras, XII, 14; Th. Optendrenk, *op. cit.*, p. 84 f.

[2] F. Cumont, *op. cit.*, I, p. 47: "Mais, afin sans doute de justifier le dicton qui veut qu'on ne prête qu'aux riches, on s'est crû autorisé à rattacher aux mystères mithriaques une série d'inscriptions, qui n'ont avec eux que des rapports très éloignés; je veux parler des dédicaces à Sol Invictus".

[3] G. Wissowa, *Religion und Kultus der Römer*, p. 90.

immortality of the soul, a future judgement, and the resurrection of the dead [1]. We have found traces of all these elements in the cult of *Sol Invictus Elagabal*, if our interpretation of symbols and representations has not misled us.

When the cult of *Sol Invictus Elagabal* had become completely established, thanks to the persistence and inflexible purpose of Elagabalus, the cult of Mithras was already on the wane, Sol Invictus having become an influential competitor at the beginning of the third century. But just when it had become evident that Sol Invictus was about to eclipse Persian Mithras, the former was struck by a damaging blow by the *damnatio memoriae* of his high priest. This had been interpreted by many scholars as a sign of the approaching end of the Syrian cult. For some time *Sol Invictus Elagabal* lost all esteem in Rome. In a sense, this situation favoured Mithras, but it was of very brief duration. Mithraism was not made the sole religion, and so the cult of Sol Invictus was able to regain its position in the end. Priests and adherents continued to serve the interests of this cult, that in its essence so completely satisfied the needs of the time. The cult of *Sol Invictus Elagabal* played its part in bringing the Romans of the third century to accept the concept of syncretism, and in this lay its greatest significance. Nevertheless, it was not until the reforms of Aurelian in A.D. 274 that, in spite of the inglorious end that had been planned for it as exemplified in the person of Elagabalus [2], the cult of *Sol Invictus Elagabal* was completely accepted in its definitive form.

The cult of the Syrian sun god survived and continued to evolve. Inscriptions once again mentioned him, his portrait and dedications to him appeared more and more often on the imperial coins, and there were even a few emperors who had themselves portrayed in Rome with the features of Sol Invictus. Unfortunately, the military anarchy that for almost a half century made every social, cultural, and religious activity impossible, also prevented the preservation of much more of the cult of Sol Invictus.

In the same period, Mithraism, too, sustained a heavy blow. When, about A.D. 274, the barbarians conquered definitively the

[1] F. Cumont, *Les Mystères de Mithra*, p. 202.
[2] L. Homo, *Les Empereurs Romains et le Christianisme*, Paris, 1931, p. 202.

province of Dacia, and when the Roman legions were defeated at the *Agri Decumates*, between the Rhine and the Danube, occupied by the Goths since A.D. 260, two regions were lost to Mithraism [1]. The importance of these two regions is shown by the fact that there were a large number of *spelaea* along the *limes*.

But the most important factor in the loss of influence suffered by Mithraism was the introduction by L. Domitius Aurelianus, in A.D. 274, of a reconstituted cult of the sun under the collective title of Deus Sol Invictus. By this means, Aurelian accomplished the saving solution. In place of the unstable conditions engendered by anarchy and rebellion, he was able to bring about the moral unity so urgently needed. Where other measures had failed, the restored and adapted sun cult preserved the fibre of Roman society until the time when Christendom was to make the survival of any pagan cult impossible.

5. Iconic representation of Sol Invictus Elagabal

With the exception of Studniczka [2], no one has attempted to answer the question of whether images of Sol Invictus Elagabal were ever made. The authors who have studied this extremely interesting period of syncretism in the history of Roman religion left the cult of Sol Invictus untouched, either because they considered it of little importance, or because it did not interest them.

The cult of Sol Invictus, in common with a number of other cults that originated in the Near East and in which external appearances played a very important part (particularly the cults of Mithras, the Magna Mater, and Isis), attached almost as much importance to the external elements of worship as to the wealth of mysteries and the doctrines with their profound emotional impact. One of these external elements—in addition to the daily rituals, the annual procession, and recurrent celebrations in connection with the theogamy—must have been the representation of the sun god. This is a hypothesis which has not hitherto been put forward, and which will thus be further elucidated in the following.

[1] G. Wissowa, *op. cit.*, pp. 89-90.

[2] F. Studniczka, *Elagabal* in *Archäologisch-Epigraphische Mitteilungen*, VIII (1884), pp. 64 f. He later withdrew his hypothesis concerning iconographic representations.

The Syrian milieu in which the cult of Sol Invictus reached maturity was rich in celestial deities and sun gods. Some of these are known to have been represented in human form, one example being the Baal who, after his identification with Jupiter Optimus Maximus during the reign of Elagabalus, was given a temple in Rome within the *pomerium* on the Aventine. Persian Mithras, companion or master of the sun god and on a few reliefs apparently also sometimes his patron [1], was usually represented in the *adyton* as a youth killing the bull. Many reliefs found in *mithraea* show a sun god with attributes clearly distinct from those of Mithras [2].

The anthropomorphic representations of other gods do not, of course, provide any basis for the conclusion that *Sol Invictus Elagabal* was also shown in human form. Nevertheless, this analogy disposes of many objections that might be raised against the possibility of such representations having existed.

The cult was already wide-spread long before Elagabalus assumed control of the Roman Empire, and it spread much further during his reign. Epigraphic evidence has demonstrated that temples or other places of worship to Sol Invictus were built even in the farthest reaches of the *imperium*, for example, at Apulum in Dacia, Zweifalten in Raetia, Vettona in Italia, Intercisa in Pannonia, and El-Kantara in Egypt. How can we gain any idea of the form of worship in these places unless we assume that images of the sun god were used [3]. What was the mentality of the legions who established most of these cult centres? Among these soldiers, the *Hemeseni* were the most active and they certainly had become accustomed to a religious image, symbolic or otherwise, at Emesa. It is inconceivable that the cult centres had no image of the god worshipped there, and it is hardly probable that only Emesa, and later the *Elagabalium* in Rome, had a symbolic representation of Sol Invictus.

It would be more logical to entertain doubts about the existence

[1] M. J. Vermaseren, *Mithras, de geheimzinnige god*, pp. 76-77.

[2] F. Cumont, *Textes et Monuments*, II, *passim*; M. J. Vermaseren, *CIMRM*, I-II, 1956-1959.

[3] There was also an *ara Solis* (*Invicti*) found at Tusculum (*cf. CIL* XIV, 2583) that cannot be ascribed to Mithras (*cf.* F. Cumont, *op. cit.*, II, inscription n° 197), one at Mouzaiaville in Mauretania (*CIL* VIII, 9281), and one at Rome (*Bolletino della Commissione archeologica di Roma*, 1881, p. 6).

of iconographic representations of the ancient indigenous sun god. The nature and attributes of this sun god were general and remained vague. But there is adequate proof of the fact that this god was represented in an anthropomorphic form. We need think only of his sculptural figure in the Circus. But Sol Invictus was a deity of a much more concrete character. Ancient tradition and the influence of analogous gods from neighbouring regions had little by little borne fruit in defining his character and attributes; the image handed down to his followers had become anthropomorphised [1].

Was not Elagabalus accustomed to seeing at least symbolic representations of Sol Invictus in the temples of Syria? This would explain his misguided attempt on the Palladium to join the sun god in theogamy to Minerva. In the same sense we recall the winter Elagabalus spent at Nicomedia, when he sent his instructions to Rome. Sol Invictus Elagabal was proclaimed the first god of the Empire, and his name was to take precedence over that of any other god at every ritual ceremony. Even the senators were to observe this ruling at the opening of the Senate. It can be argued from above that Elagabalus could not visualize the normal course of events without the symbolic presence of Sol Invictus, and that he therefore had himself represented as emperor and high priest sacrificing before the official deity of the *imperium*. This icon was sent to the Senate in Rome together with his commands. We have reason to suppose that, as later in Taurus and Nicomedia, a representation of the sun god was left behind at Emesa to promote the continuation of the cult there in the proper atmosphere. The temple at Emesa remained open for worship even after the sacred conical stone, the symbol of Sol Invictus, had been taken to Rome[2]. This meant that another representation of the sun god had to remain in Emesa to ensure the continuation of the cult there.

Each year, *Sol Invictus Elagabal* drew a large number of votaries and adherents to Emesa, not only from the immediate surroundings but also from far beyond the borders of Syria, as the ancient historians unanimously relate. In view of the fact that, for this and

[1] *CIL* VI, 14099: *Dis Manibus Timotheae M. Ulpius Nicanor vernae suae fecit. Soli tibi commendo, qui manus intulit ei.*

[2] F. Lenormant, *Elagæbalus* in *DS*, II, p. 531; Dio Cassius, LXXIX, 21.

analogous cults, for example Mithraism, the climax of the religious experience, besides the customary sacrifices, was the sight of the deity in the sanctuary, it is impossible to conceive of a place of cult worship without the visible presence of the deity. To the family which held the monopoly of the hereditary high priesthood, this not only meant being held in high esteem but it also represented a dependable asset and a source of income. Apart from their traditional adherence to Sol Invictus, this must have been one of the reasons why as little as possible, and preferably nothing, was permitted to be changed. The simplest solution is obvious: a symbolic representation of *Sol Invictus Elagabal* probably remained in the temple, so that the ordinary *sacerdotes* could continue to perform their office.

All this, however, does not necessarily indicate that Sol Invictus was anthropomorphically represented; nevertheless, the coins issued by Elagabalus suggest that he was. Besides those showing the conical stone [1], some of these coins represent *Sol Invictus Elagabal* in the guise of a youth [2]. If the epigraphically preserved name *Ammudati* is a remodelled denomination for *Sol Invictus Elagabal* [3], then the acrostic by Commodian [4] must refer to this sun god and our hypothesis has found additional support.

[1] H. Cohen, *Description historique des monnaies frappées sous l'empire romain*, Paris 1884², vol. IV, p. 325, n° 16; p. 349, n° 267; p. 349, n° 20; and so on.

[2] H. Cohen, *op. cit.*, IV, p. 325, n° 19; p. 337, n° 134; p. 338, n° 153; p. 349, n° 272.

[3] *CIL* III, 4300: *Deo Soli Alagabalo Ammudati, milites legionis I Adiutricis bis Piae Fidelis Constantis ....*; *cf.* F. Richter, *Sol* in *Roscher*, IV, p. 1145. For Ammudates, see: E. Meyer, *Ammudates* in *Roscher*, I, p. 1229; F. Studniczka, *op. cit.*, p. 65; Tümpel in *RE*, I, 1868.

[4] Commodian, *Instructiones*, I, 18:

Ammudatemque suum cultores more colebant,
Magnus erat illis; quando fuit aurum in aede
Mittebant capita sub numine quasi praesenti.
Ventum est ad summum, ut Caesar tollerat aurum;
Deficit numen: aut fugit aut transit in ignem.
Auctor huius sceleris constat, qui formabat eundem:
Tot viros et magnos seduxit false prophetans;
Et modo reticuti qui solebat esse divinus.
Erumpebat enim vocis quasi mente mutata,
Tanquam illi deus ligni loqueretur in aurem.

The *divina forma* that fifty years later made Aurelian victorious and that he later saw near the temple of Emesa might also conceivably have been an iconographic representation [1].

The descriptions of archaeological material carrying the epigraphic text of the dedication, make it sufficiently clear that Sol Invictus was shown in human form, not only at Rome but also in other parts of the Empire. A figure of Sol Invictus borne by an eagle was found in Rome [2]; an image of the sun god fully weaponed [3] remind us of Sol Invictus' function as protector of the legionaries. The earliest datable inscription, from A.D., is also accompanied by a representation of Sol Invictus [4]. On other monuments he is shown as a youth [5] or standing in a chariot drawn by four horses [6].

In other cases the representations of Sol Invictus show either the head alone [7], or a life size bust with a nimbus [8]. The text of an inscription found at Thamugadi in Mauretania explicitly mentions the dedication of an image representing Sol Invictus [9], and the same applies to one from El-Kantara [10], the text of which makes it quite clear that the old figure representing the sun god was replaced by a new one.

None of this evidence, of course, gives absolute certainty that Sol Invictus was represented in human form. We have no sufficiently reliable text with a clear description of the representation of the sun god, although there are a few indications available, in addition to those already mentioned. In the year A.D. 250, two Christians

[1] *Historia Augusta, Vita Aureliani*, 25.
[2] *CIL* VI, 710: protome Dei Solis aquila vecta.
[3] *Ibid.*, 712: protome Dei Solis clipeata.
[4] *Ibid.*, 715: protome Dei Solis.
[5] *Ibid.*, 2821: Iuvenis (Sol) chlamyde amictus.
[6] *Ibid.*, 3721: .... il Sole sopra un cocchio, tirato da 4 cavalli....
[7] *CIL* V, 807: effigies capitis.
[8] *Bolletino della Commissione archeologica di Roma*, 1886, p. 101: .. Grande lastra di marmo, nella quale sono scolpiti a bassorilievo e di grandezza naturale, il busto del Sole radiato ...; *CIL* III, 1953: effigies Solis radiati.
[9] *CIL* VIII, 2350: *statuam, ... ex sestertiis V posuit, idemque donum dedit dedicavit.*
[10] *Bulletin Archéologique*, 1931, p. 401, n° 6: *Pro salute Dominorum Nostrorum Augustorum templum Dei Solis Invicti Iulius Draco, centurio legionis III Augustae, praepositus Numeri Hemesenorum, delapsum restituit dedicavitque et sigillum renovavit.*

named Abdon and Sennen were tortured and then murdered for refusing to perform the prescribed sacrifices to the pagan gods and the emperor. Before their execution, they were dragged into the presence of an image representing the sun god [1]. For the reasons already given above, this sun god could only have been Sol Invictus. The relevant text from the *Breviarium Romanum* is not the only case of an allusion to a *simulacrum Solis*; there are others in the christian literature of the third century concerning saints. We are well aware of the fact that great caution must be exercised in analysing this literature, and therefore refer to this kind of material only for the sake of completeness.

Nevertheless, it is reasonable to accept an iconographic representation of Sol Invictus, which raises the question of why more evidence on this point cannot be found. In our opinion, the explanation is to be found mainly in the *damnatio memoriae*. Furthermore, the cult of Sol Invictus was, with brief interruptions, the official cult from the time of Elagabalus onwards, and the large and splendidly decorated temples, that its status permitted, offered a source of highly desirable building material in later centuries. This would explain the "complete disappearance". The hatred felt towards Elagabalus, caused more by his actions than by the doctrines of Sol Invictus, led, after his murder, to the destruction of everything that could remind people of him. Not only the monuments to Elagabalus but also those to Sol Invictus had to disappear. In the first fever of revenge, anything reminiscent of the young Eastern ruler was destroyed or carried off. Nevertheless, the destruction was not complete; much remained after the murder, but it either disappeared or was later incorporated into other structures.

The reasons why the surviving inscriptions and monuments of, for instance, Mithraism provide such positive indications of its distribution are equally clear. Mithraism never underwent such destruction, and besides, the subterranean caves offered natural protection for its images and cult objects. The fate of the beautiful temples and the images of Sol Invictus was quite different. The descriptions of his temples in Rome, which surpassed these of

[1] *Breviarium Romanum*, pars aestiva, ed. Ratisbonae, Romae et Vindobonae, 1919, p. 704: . . . *colligatis pedibus tracti sunt ante Solis simulacrum*. . . .

Emesa in splendour, make it the more likely that their components were used for other purposes when the syncretistic cult of the sun god no longer existed.

All this, however, should not be taken to mean that the cult of Sol Invictus was of only limited importance; this would lead to an underestimation of the strong influence it exerted.

The scarcity of data also means that one must be careful not to attach too little importance to the few distinct indications or pieces of evidence supporting our thesis of anthropomorphic or other iconographic representation of Sol Invictus Elagabal. The evidence, slight though it is, should not be disregarded on the basis of the statement by Lucian [1] that "In the temple itself, to the left of the entrance, stands first the throne of the Sun, but the Sun does not occupy this seat; indeed, there are no images (*xoana*) of the Sun alone or the Moon alone. Concerning the reason why they thought they must do this, I was able to learn the following.

"They say that it is permissible to make images of all the other gods, because their face and natural form is not visible to all; the Sun and the Moon, to the contrary, are completely visible and everyone sees them. What reason is there to represent them by images when they show themselves in the heavens?"

Apart from the question of the reliability of Lucian's statement, which is open to doubt, we may point out that the reference here is exclusively to Hierapolis and to an explanation of a throne in the temple with no image of a god sitting on it. The implications of the explanation itself extend far beyond the limits of the subject under discussion. It is quite possible that this explanation must be ascribed solely to Lucian. If it really reflects a Hierapolitan concept, then it must concern exclusively the Sun alone and the Moon alone, not in relation to another deity not further specified as any particular solar or lunar deity. Since, throughout this description, Lucian places such unusual emphasis on the absence of a sun god on the throne, he was in all probability reporting a strictly local situation. He was so impressed by it that it seems almost as if it were a unique case, which strengthens our conviction that it concerns only Hierapolis. If an unoccupied throne for the sun god had been the

[1] Lucian, *De Dea Syria*, 34.

rule everywhere in Syria, or common in all cults of the sun god throughout the Roman Empire, he would certainly not have been so struck by it. We are therefore convinced that this report by Lucian is not to be interpreted as evidence against the existence of images of Sol Invictus. Nevertheless, we do not feel that it is justified to argue that such representations of other gods form evidence for the existence of such images. On weighing the evidence for and against iconographic or anthropomorphic representation of Sol Invictus Elagabal, however, we feel justified in concluding that there is every likelihood that the sun god was so represented. Sol Invictus Elagabal had certain well-defined characteristics, his cult was independent, and one of his high priests made it the most widely distributed official cult of the Empire [1].

[1] There is an important series of dedications on which the statue or bust of the sun god occurs, alone or with other gods, with no explicit dedication showing that the god was Sol Invictus. There are also the many representations on *amphorae* and *lucernae* (*cf. CIL* VIII, 22639 and 22644). There are the *anaglyphae* or reliefs on such dedications as *CIL* VIII, 8440 and 15625 (*caput vel protome Solis*); *ibid.*, 23501 (*caput Solis*); *ibid.*, 24260 and 25466 (*Solis protome*); *ibid.*, 24136 and 24525, etc. (*Sol radiatus*); *ibid.*, 22739 (*Caput radiatum Solis*) with Jupiter and Luna; *CIL* XIII, 6722 (*Sol chlamydatus et radiatus*); *ibid.*, 6147 (*Sol in quadriga*); *ibid.*, 4467, 6093, 6310, 6795, 7274, 11263, 11830b (*imago Solis inter reliquos deos*).

CHAPTER VI

THE REIGN OF AURELIAN

1. Spring A.D. 270 to the end of 275

The period of nearly a half century from the accession of Alexander Severus to the reign of L. Domitius Aurelianus was one in which the political, religious, and administrative situation in Rome and throughout the Empire underwent a phase of extreme disorganization known as the time of the "soldier emperors". This period between the emperors Elagabalus and Aurelian, the two promulgators of the syncretic sun cult, was characterized by instability and disruption. The rapid succession of soldier emperors not only weakened imperial authority but caused great confusion in all quarters, not least in the religious sphere. The *impetus* towards syncretism associated with Sol Invictus was allowed to fade with little opposition. The cult continued, but its adherents had lost their original fervour. The much-needed reforms were carried out by Aurelian as the crux of his efforts to establish political unification.

Aurelian [1]

Lucius Domitius Aurelianus was born near Sirmium in Pannonia Inferior on the 5th of September, A.D. 214. According to his biography in the *Historia Augusta*, his mother was a priestess of the sun god. Although this has been questioned, it is quite likely [2]. The

[1] L. Homo, *Essai sur le règne de l'empereur Aurélien* in *Bibliothèque des Écoles françaises d'Athènes et de Rome*, fasc. 89, Paris 1904; P. Schnabel, *Die Chronologie Aurelians* in *Klio*, XX (1926), pp. 363 f.; A. Stein, *Aurelian* in *Klio*, XXI (1927), pp. 78 f.; W. H. Fischer, *The Augustan vita Aurelian* in *Journal of Roman Studies* (1929), pp. 125 f.; E. Groag, *Collegien und Zwanggenossenschaften im 3. Jahrhundert*, Stuttgart 1904, II, pp. 481 f.; B. Filow, *Die Teilung des Aurelianischen Dakien* in *Klio*, XII (1912), pp. 234 f.; A. Piganiol, *Histoire de Rome*, Paris 1954[4], with extensive bibliography.

[2] *Historia Augusta, Vita Aureliani*, 4,2: *Matrem eius, Callicrates Tyrius Graecorum longe doctissimus scriptor, sacerdotem templi Solis qui in vico eo, in quo habitabant parentes, ... fuisse dicit. Ibid.*, 5,5: *Data est ei praeterea, cum*

numerous sanctuaries of the sun cult show that the worship of the sun god in the provinces of Dacia and Pannonia was for a long time very important. Moreover, the ancient Italian cult of the sun god in Rome was patronised by the *gens* Aurelia and had become, so to speak, the house cult of the gens [1]. It is therefore quite possible that the mother of the man who was to become Emperor Aurelian, the wife of a *colonus* of Senator Aurelius and perhaps herself a freedwoman of the Aurelii, held the sun god in special esteem and that she was, for these reasons, chosen in preference to others to be the priestess of Deus Sol in her home district.

About Aurelian's youth we know little. When he was still a boy he gave evidence of possessing a keen intelligence, a strong body, and the stamina to undergo exhausting military exercises [2]. Shortly after the death of Alexander Severus in A.D. 234 he began his military career. His talents and impressive appearance earned him the increasing regard of his superiors. After the death of Claudius and of Quintillus at Sirmium, he was acclaimed emperor in the spring of A.D. 270, in accordance with the wishes of Claudius [3].

Aurelian's main ambition was the unification of the far-flung parts of the Empire and the renewal of their ties with the central authority, as well as the restoration of imperial prestige, which had suffered greatly under the various wars and the rapid succession of emperors.

After first defeating the Iuthungi, he went to Rome to gather up the reins of authority [4]. His first stay in the capital was brief; he arrived towards the end of the spring of 270 and departed in the autumn to drive the Vandals out of Pannonia. From the close of 271

legatus ad Persas isset, patera, qualis solet imperatoribus dari a Rege Persarum, in qua insculptus erat Sol habitu quo colebatur ab eo templo, in quo mater eius fuerat sacerdos.

[1] Sextus Pompeius Festus, *De verborum significatu quae supersunt*, 18, p. 22 (*ed.* W. M. Lindsay, Teubner, 1933): *Aureliam familiam ex Sabinis oriundam a Sole dictam putant, quod ei publice a populo romano datus sit locus, in quo sacra faceret Soli, qui ex hoc Aureli dicebantur, ut Valesii, Papisii pro eo quod est Valerii, Papirii.* (Cited by L. Homo, *op. cit.*, p. 28).

[2] *Historia Augusta, Vita Aureliani*, 4, 1: *A prima aetate ingenio vivacissimus viribus clarus, nullum unquam diem praetermisit, quamvis festum, quamvis vacantem, quo non se pilo et sagittae ceterisque armorum exerceret officiis.*

[3] Zonaras, XII, 26.

[4] The only text mentioning this short visit to Rome is that of Zosimos, I, 48.

until the summer of 272, he fought in the East against Zenobia, queen of Palmyra. Meanwhile, he had expelled the Goths from Dacia, which earned him the epithet of "Gothicus" [1]. The decisive battle against Zenobia was fought near Emesa, and ended in the annihilation of her army. This great, crucial victory he ascribed to the special mediation and protection of the guardian god of Emesa, *Sol Invictus Elagabal* [2], and since he himself was a devoted worshipper of the sun god he dedicated handsome sacrifices and several temples to this deity. These were the actions of a man who was not only religious but a clever politician as well; they won the allegiance of the people of Syria to Rome.

On his return journey, Aurelian fought several battles with the Persians, whom he conquered without difficulty, thus adding the epithet "Parthicus" to his titles [3]. On reaching Moesia Inferior, he defeated the Carpi and gained the epithet "Carpicus" [4]. At that moment the news reached him that Palmyra had revolted again and could count on the support of Egypt, which meant that he had to resume the campaign of A.D. 271-272. With extraordinary speed he marched to Palmyra and forced the city to surrender before it had time to complete its defences [5]. The city was destroyed and plundered by the legionaries, who did not spare the temple of the

[1] *Historia Augusta, Vita Aureliani*, 22, 2-3; *CIL* XII, 2673: *Imperatori Caesari Lucio Domitio Aureliano, pio felici augusto.. pontifici maximo, Germanico maximo, Gothico maximo .....*; *Ibid.* 5456: *Restitutori orbis, Imperatori Caesari Lucio Domitio Aureliano, pio felici augusto invicto, pontifici maximo, Germanico maximo, Gothico maximo ....*

[2] *Historia Augusta, Vita Aureliani*, 25, 4: *Recepto igitur orientis statu Emesam victor Aurelianus ingressus est ac statim ad templum Heliogabali tendit, quasi eam formam numinis repperit, quam in bello faventem vidit. Quare et illic templum fundavit donariis ingentibus positis et Romae Soli templum posuit maiore honorificentia consecratum.*

[3] *Historia Augusta, Vita Aureliani*, 31, 5; *CIL* VI, 1112: *Imperatori Caesari L. Domitio Aureliano, pio felici invicto augusto, pontifici maximo, Gothico maximo, Germanico maximo, Parthico maximo ...*; *CIL* XII, 5549: *Imperator Caesar L. Domitius Aurelianus ... Germanicus maximus, Gothicus maximus, Carpicus maximus, Parthicus maximus .....*

[4] See note 3; *Historia Augusta, Vita Aureliani*, 30, 4: *Pacato igitur Oriente, in Europam Aurelianus redit victor atque illic Carporum copias afflixit ...*; *CIL* III, 12456: *Iovi Optimo Maximo ... gratiam referens, quod Imperator Aurelianus vicit reginam Zenobiam invisosque tyrannos et Carpos inter Carsium et Sucidavam delevit, Durostorum Aureliam .....*

[5] Zosimos, I, 61.

local sun god. When Aurelian heard of this, he had the temple restored and promised that a *pontifex* would be brought from Rome to perform the dedication [1]. This fact is of great importance in determining the true nature of the sun god whose cult Aurelian re-established and whom he made the official chief deity of the Empire.

After the East had submitted completely to the authority of Aurelian, he acquired the title *Restitutor Orientis* [2]. He then returned to Rome and set out immedidately for Gallia, where he subdued the Germani [3]. Probus, whom he had appointed commander, defeated the Franks in the lower Rhine region, as well as the Alamanni on the upper Rhine, and restored the *limes* [4].

Once back in Rome, Aurelian celebrated a triumph which was, according to his biographer, glorious indeed [5]. It had been a long time since the Romans had been able to celebrate a well-earned triumph with such enthusiasm. Numerous inscriptions bear witness to the fact that Aurelian was honoured for his work of pacification and for unifying the Empire. He had put an end to disorder, the fragmentation, and the dissatisfaction. From then onwards he was the *Restitutor Orbis* [6], and by degrees his list of titles was lenghtened with such as *Pacator Orbis* [7], *Restitutor Patriae* [8], *Reparator et Conservator Patriae* [9], *Conservator Orbis* [10], *Restitutor Galliarum* [11].

[1] *Historia Augusta, Vita Aureliani*, 31, 7-9.

[2] H. Cohen, *Description historique des monnaies*, IV, p. 199, n° 213.

[3] *CIL* III, 12333; here Aurelian is called Brittanicus after Germanicus.

[4] The conquest of the Germani is reported by Victor, *Caesar*, 35, 1: *Germanis Gallia demotis.*

[5] *Historia Augusta, Vita Aureliani*, 33-34.

[6] H. Cohen, *op. cit.*, VI, p. 197, n° 200; *CIL* XI, 1214: *Restitutori totius Orbis sui, Domino Imperatori Caesari L. Domitio Aureliano, pio felici victorioso augusto, Valerius Sabinus ...*; *CIL* XII, 5456; *Ibid.* 5561: *Pacatori et restitutori orbis Imperatori Caesari, L. Domitio Aureliano...*; *CIL* VIII, 20537.

[7] *CIL* XII, 5549; H. Cohen, *op. cit.*, VI, p. 192, n° 161: *Pacator Orbis.*

[8] *CIL* III, 7586: *Imperator Caesar L. Domitius Aurelianus ... restitutor patriae ....*

[9] *CIL* III, 12333.

[10] *CIL* V, 4319: *Magno Augusto, principi maximo, Imperatori fortissimo, conservatori orbis, L. Domitio Aureliano....*

[11] *CIL* XII, 2673: *Imperatori Caesari L. Domitio Aureliano pio .. restitutori Galliarum.*

After his triumph early in A.D. 274, Aurelian turned his attention to the reorganization of the empire. The Senate had consistently thwarted him, even though his victories helped to reduce the friction, and now his independent ideas and the aura of divinity he assumed inflamed the Senate against him. Aurelian had reunited the Empire under the authority of one man, and he wished to make this unification permanent. He therefore made every effort to consolidate imperial power and render it unassailable: the emperor, the sole ruler, was even to be a deity. Aurelian was aspiring to become absolute ruler.

The Senate did not fail to protest vehemently against this violation of the principle of imperial authority, the deification of the emperor during his lifetime. Aurelian therefore attempted to obtain the support of the aristocracy and populace for his politics. This he achieved on the strength of religious, political and social reforms.

He surrounded Rome with the wall that still bears his name and a large part of which still stands [1]. He started to build a new forum, built new roads in the provinces and repaired the milestones [2] and even ordered public baths to be built for the inhabitants of Caesena [3], Grumentum [4] and other places.

Aurelian also carried out currency reforms and instituted controls that led to a more valuable monetary standard. But he pleased the populace most by his reforms pertaining to the food supply; bread became heavier and was distributed free or sold at low price [5]. Oil was once again issued gratis every day. This form of poor relief initiated by Septimius Severus, was reduced by Elagabalus, and re-instituted by Alexander Severus. Occasionally, salt and pork were also distributed. These measures were continued by Aurelian, to the great satisfaction of the populace, who supported him because

[1] L. Homo, *op. cit.*, pp. 215-306, where a study is devoted to the wall.

[2] *CIL* VIII, 10374: *L. Domitius Aurelianus, pius felix augustus... miliaria orbis sui restituit*; *Bulletin Archéologique*, 1893, p. 182.

[3] *CIL* XI, 556: *Balneum Aurelianum ex liberalitate Imperatoris Caesaris M. Aurelii ... indulgentia pecuniae quam deus Aurelianus concesserat....*

[4] *CIL* X, 222: *Balnea ex disciplina Domini Nostri L. Domitii Aureliani ... restituit Q. Aem. Victor Saxonianus.*

[5] *Historia Augusta, Vita Aureliani*, 47, 1: *Panes Urbis Romae uncia de Aegypto vectigali auxit.*

they were convinced that he cared about them. That was all the Romans asked.

In this way Aurelian not only restored order and peace after a period of disruption and painful uncertainty, but at the same time laid the foundations on which to realise his ideal. The unification of the *imperium*, followed by his political and social reforms, had only partially satisfied his ambitions. The bond that was to hold everything together was his religious reforms. The moral unity of the Roman Empire was expressed in the establishment of the cult of Deus Sol Invictus, and this was the culmination of Aurelian's efforts. The establishment of this sun cult represents the most unusual religious renewal to occur in the Roman world during the third century [1].

2. The religious reforms instituted by Aurelian

Aurelian's policies were consistently characterized by an equitable absolutism. By A.D. 274, after ruling barely four years, he had rid almost the entire Roman Empire of internal disturbances and had pushed invaders back beyond the *limes*. Within the Empire, he had gained the confidence of the populace and thus prepared the way for his religious reorganization, which was to result in a legalized despotism.

As a consequence, the instrument of this religious organisation —the cult that Aurelian planned to introduce—had to satisfy a double objective. It had to be subservient to the emperor's policies and it must in no sense be in conflict with, or even cause the least friction with, the religious ideas of the Romans of the time. Although this may seem logical and simple, the experiment was not free from dangerous complications. Much had changes in the preceding years, and the majority of the citizens, including the most prominent and influential officials, no longer subscribed to the rigid views upheld by previous generations. This had not been the case fifty years earlier, when Elagabalus attempted his reformation, but the broad lines of syncretism were now accepted. The common people had never paid much attention to complicated arguments or gone deeply into religious problems. Self-interest had always determined their reactions, and this was to a certain extent also true of many of those

[1] F. Altheim, *Die Soldatenkaiser*, Frankfurt 1939, p. 277.

who accepted the doctrines of Sol Invictus. The leading classes had always differed in their demands, and did not favour the idea of a new cult. They were, however, no longer satisfied with the old one. The philosophers of the third century had systematized ideas which had become current and had made syncretism intellectually satisfying, and this had prepared the upper classes to accept Aurelian's religious reforms.

As a result of all this, when the emperor began to introduce his religious reforms he knew what he wished to accomplish, he had already prepared the ground, and he had the means to execute his plans. The objective he had set himself when he ascended the throne had three parts, and two of these had already been realized: territorial and political unity had been restored. Only moral unity remained to be achieved.

To Aurelian the way to accomplish this unity lay in the cult of Sol Invictus, the essential elements of which he had developed himself and which he intended to make the official national cult for the citizens of his empire. This cult would—he was convinced—form the mortar with which to cement his political system into a solid structure destined successfully to eliminate all resistance for a long time to come.

Religious syncretism had become the monotheistic worship of the sun. The cult of Deus Sol Invictus combined all elements the emperor required and also provided him with the aura of divinity, which made his plan virtually perfect.

For this state of affairs, the reforms initiated by Elagabalus at the beginning of the century were decisive. It is as if the years of Elagabalus' rule were the shining event whose rays were later to give meaning and direction to religious life. Aurelian's overwhelming success in 274 would be inconceivable without the cult of Sol Invictus Elagabal. Nonetheless, a distinction must be made between Elagabalus' cult and that of Aurelian. Although in essence and content the former served as a model, the latter had a character of its own. And the Deus Sol Invictus of Aurelian is even less to be identified with the sun god of Palmyra [1].

[1] P. Habel, *Zur Geschichte des in Rom eingeführten Sonnenkultes*, pp. 97, f.; F. Richter, *Sol* in *Roscher*, IV, p. 1147.

The way in which Aurelian introduced his reforms provides a clear reflection of the content of his cult. In the hand of the emperor, this cult represented at once the end and the means. His objective, as has already been pointed out, was to strenghten the political unity of the empire by instilling a sense of moral unity. Consequently, the cult had to be in conformity with the contemporary religious convictions of the Romans on the one hand, and be a suitable instrument for attaining the intended objective on the other. Only a restructured cult like this of Deus Sol Invictus could be entirely satisfactory, both internally and externally, because it was Roman for the Romans—no matter what part of the *imperium* they had been born in.

The Roman nature of Aurelian's achievement emerges even more clearly if we keep in mind what distinguished the Illyrian emperors in general—and Aurelian in particular—from the Severi in attitude and character. The Severi were completely Eastern in everything. This trait culminated in the rule of Elagabalus, who went to extremes in his attempt to replace the Roman by the strictly Syrian in Rome itself, an attempt which could only end in disaster. The last of the Severi, Alexander, thought to gain security and support by giving equal importance to the Roman and the Hellenistic-Eastern elements in his policy. The Illyrian emperors rejected both courses; their motivation was purely Roman. This was not solely a matter of feeling; it also had to do with their sharp insight into the general political situation.

After a century in which Eastern culture and religious concepts had threatened to supplant the Roman way of life, Roman nationalism reacted by demanding an intensified form of resistance. Aurelian's religious reforms provided a suitable focus for such resistance, and the hope that they would be successful seemed entirely justified. But this great reform had still more to recommend it: it not only synthesized Roman nationalist reaction but was also the move on the religious chessboard most likely to checkmate the increasingly insistent threat of Christianity.

The concepts and political implications of the cult of Deus Sol Invictus, as well as the reaction of the Romans, seemed to promise a successful future, as long as the protection of the emperors was assured.

Elagabalus had been unreasonable and impulsive. His recklessness and outlandish behaviour had even robbed his attempted reform of any favourable effect the time factor might have had. Aurelian did not make this mistake. He carried out his programme progressively, in three phases [1], and with such success that in the final phase he could consider his work completed.

a) *The first phase*

Deus Sol Invictus officially recognized as the chief deity of the Roman State

Sol Invictus Elagabal disappeared from the public religious scene after the *damnatio memoriae* of A.D. 222. Alexander Severus had had the symbol of the sun god taken back to Emesa, which put an end to the official worship of Sol Invictus in Rome. But the deeper meaning of the cult continued to exert a spiritual influence, so that in the end what disappeared was the specifically Eastern, or rather Syrian, elements. Sol Invictus continued to be venerated everywhere, with no interruption, because his cult satisfied the religious longings of the faithful far beyond the borders of Syria [2]. There is even an inscription to the sun god found in Dacia and dating from the year 270, the year in which Aurelian succeeded Claudius [3].

In the course of his military campaigns Aurelian had come into contact with the most varied types of citizens of the Empire and had had the opportunity to observe their religions at first hand. When he became emperor, and was ready to give his reorganizational plans a concrete form, he thus had a rich supply of useful material to drawn on.

From his earliest youth his mother had taught him to understand and respect the beneficence of the sun god, and even as a general and as an emperor he did not forget. Moreover, on his long journeys

[1] The division into three stages or phases was made by L. Homo, *Essai sur le règne de l'empereur Aurélien*, Paris 1904; L. Homo, *De la Rome païenne à la Rome chrétienne*, Paris 1950.

[2] e.g. *CIL* VI, 2821; *CIL* III, 4300, from A.D. 249 in Pannonia Superior; *CIL* III, 828: *Soli pro salute Domini Nostri Augusti, pontificis maximi, Septimius Antiochianus ...*; *CIL* XII, 1551: *Ignibus Aeternis Iulius Placidianus, vir clarissimus, praefectus praetorio, ex voto posuit* (dating from between A.D. 269 and 273).

[3] *CIL* III, 828 (see note 2) dates from A.D. 270.

across the Roman Empire at the head of his troops, he had been constantly reminded of their preference for this particular deity. For a century, Sol Invictus had been the special protector and guardian of the troops, and fifty years had passed since this sun god had been made the patron deity of the legions. It is therefore hardly surprising that Aurelian regarded the cult of Sol Invictus as the most suitable element for reestablishing the moral unity of the Empire.

It appears to us that there was a stroke of genius in Aurelian's reorganization that lay in his adaption of the cult to the Roman mentality. His religious reform, however, was in no sense a mere re-institution of the cult of Sol Invictus Elagabal. After the reign and *damnatio memoriae* of Elagabalus, the cult of Sol Invictus gradually lost its local strictly Syrian nature. Emesa retained its prestige and attraction, but throughout the empire the Eastern externals gradually made way for more general features, which were well-known to Roman cults. The sun god, Sol Invictus, attracted a following because the dogmas of his cult were acceptable to all, and the sacrifices and offerings dedicated to him became, in the course of the third century, similar in kind to those dedicated to the old Roman deities. In this sense the cult had become more general; but it had lost its official character in the process and had consequently become the best example of a syncretic cult.

This is exactly why Aurelian chose this cult and not that of Mithras for his purposes; he needed precisely those qualities that characterised the cult of Sol Invictus at this period. For the simple reason that Aurelian did not set to work eclectically, it is impossible to indicate any single cult that he took over. He had his own system and his own methods, and used the cult of Sol Invictus as his basis.

By decree of the emperor, *Deus Sol Invictus*, to give him his full title, was acclaimed the official deity of the Roman Empire in A.D. 274, and his cult was restored to its former high estate. The coins struck for the occasion settle this point beyond any doubt [1]. One coin bears the words *Sol Dominus Imperii Romani* and a bust of Aurelian on the obverse, and the text *Aurelianus Augustus consul* and a standing figure of the emperor, offering before a burning

[1] H. Cohen, *op. cit.*, VI, p. 177, n° 15.

tripod on the other side. Another coin has the words *Sol Dominus Imperii Romani* and a bust of the sun god drawn by four horses and with an aureole; the obverse has the words *Aurelianus Augustus* and a figure of the emperor holding a paten and a staff [1]. From this time onwards, most of Aurelian's coins reflect the pre-eminence of the sun god. In order to express this, Aurelian even went so far, so to speak, as to surrender his right of coinage to the sun god [2]. *Deus Sol Invictus* was incontestably the lord and master of the Empire, *Dominus Imperii Romani.*

In its ontological components, the concept of Deus Sol Invictus is none other than the ruling concept of the third century; everyone, from the emperor to the most ordinary mortal and soldier, found something to suit his tastes in it. The doctrines of this cult, as promulgated by the emperor, remained vague and general, since they had both to suit Aurelian's plans and convey the essentials of syncretism. Basically they were still the doctrines of Sol Invictus Elagabal, divested of their Eastern trappings and their rigidity, but unchanged in that they represented the emperor as the reflection, personification, and in a sense the avatar, of the sun god. Deus Sol Invictus was considered the *conservator* of the emperor, the deity who watched over the well-being of his protégé with special care [3].

Aurelian adapted, exploited, and recast the existing cult of Sol Invictus, retaining anything of use and discarding the rest, so that the worship of Sol Invictus emerged as an essentially new synthesis, capable of attracting new followers. Aurelian's choice of the cult of Sol Invictus was quite logical, as we have already seen, not only because it was so convenient for his political purposes but also because he had known it all his life and was familiar with its beneficent influence. He had no need to seek far afield what he had already at hand.

This reasoning is confirmed if one examines Aurelian's attitude about a year before he inaugurated his religious reforms. He was

[1] H. Cohen, *op. cit.*, VI p. 178, n° 17.
[2] L. Homo, *op. cit.*, p. 185.
[3] *CIL* III, 3020: *Iovi Optimo Maximo, Soli Invicto, conservatori Aureliani*; H. Cohen, *op. cit.*, VI, p. 200, n° 228; *Soli Conservatori.*

convinced that his first brillant defeat of Zenobia near Emesa was due to the intervention of the guardian deity of that city, Sol Invictus Elagabal. His first action after the battle was to go to the temple to thank the sun god for his extraordinary help [1]. Later, while he was on his way to Rome, he learned of the revolt of Zenobia and the Palmyrene army. Aurelian then turned back immediately and administered the final defeat. His soldiers destroyed the city, and with it the local temple of the sun god. As soon as the emperor heard about this, he ordered the temple to be rebuilt and restored to his former splendour, and promised that he himself would send for high priests to come from Rome to dedicate it. This fact, to which we will refer again later, was of far-reaching importance. At this point Aurelian determined on his religious reform and the way in which it was to be carried out was fixed. The essence of his cult and the nature of his sun god cannot be identified in any sense with the cult of Palmyra, because it would otherwise have been illogical and superfluous to send *pontifices* to Palmyra to perform the dedication when local priests were available.

The religious reform conceived by Aurelian involved the undisputed supremacy of the sun god. This primacy was not only willed by the emperor but accepted by the Romans. The fact that Aurelian's reform survived, and that it encountered no resistance whatsoever should consequently occasion no surprise. Elements drawn from all the cults of the sun, including Mithraism, and especially that of Sol Invictus, provided Aurelian with material to which he gave a distinctive Roman character. This was the root of his success.

Elagabalus had established the supremacy of Sol Invictus Elagabal by making the other gods subordinate to his deity. Not only was the sun god exalted to an unprecedented position, but the other gods were humbled in the eyes of their adherents. Aurelian took a very different course in determining the rank of Deus Sol Invictus. He made all the gods equal and placed them on the same level. Beyond this, he only determined that the sun god be con-

[1] *Historia Augusta, Vita Aureliani*, 25, 3: ... *statim ad templum Heliogabali tetendit, quasi communi officio vota soluturus. Verum illic eam formam numinis repperit, quam in bello sibi faventem vidit.*

sidered as the sum of all attributes and guardian functions belonging to the other gods. In this way the cult of Deus Sol Invictus became a perfect expression of syncretism.

This view of Aurelian's religious reform is justified, in our opinion, on the basis of the fact that he had images of other gods, including Grecian Helios and Eastern Baal, placed in the temple of Deus Sol Invictus in Rome, not with the same intention as Elagabalus had had fifty years earlier but rather as the affirmation of his views. Seen in this light, the cult of Deus Sol Invictus, Aurelian's gift to the Roman Empire, was Roman for the Romans.

Although Aurelian had been born in Pannonia, he had given up everything that was not purely Roman and had carefully removed from the tenets and ritual of the cult everything with which the Romans might not agree. As a result, the cult of Deus Sol Invictus was accepted by the Romans without the least resistance as the official cult of the *Imperium*. The syncretism of the sun god had won total support and bridged the distance between the various deities. This situation is characterized by the type of representation used on many of the coins of Aurelian. The portrait of the sun god is shown above those of the emperor himself and of the goddess Concordia: Deus Sol Invictus crowned the concord between all the elements of the Empire.

b) *The second phase*

The building of a temple and the introduction of *Agones Solis*

After the primacy of Deus Sol Invictus was officially announced, the emperor's chief concern was to have a temple built as the official centre of the cult as rapidly as possible. It is obvious that the temples to Sol Invictus built during the reign of Elagabalus and which were probably still in use, although we have no concrete evidence for this, could not be utilized by Aurelian without disavantage to Deus Sol Invictus. Aurelian regarded his cult as a new religion that must conquer all hearts and satisfy everyone, and therefore could not properly house it in temples to a deity who had been compromised.

The new temple was erected on the *Campus Agrippae* in the VIIth

regio of Rome [1]. It was considered one of the most beautiful buildings in the city and praised by all the historians. Around the main circular temple building there were large porticos in which the wine for distribution was stored [2]. The interior of the temple was very richly and luxuriously decorated [3]. In order to express the syncretic character of the cult, Aurelian, like Elagabalus before him, had statues and symbols of other deities placed in the temple to emphazise their close relationship with Deus Sol Invictus. Among these, and for the same reason, were the figures of Helios and Baal [4]. As befitted the nature and exalted position of Deus Sol Invictus, Aurelian had the new temple ornamented with jewels, gold, precious stones, Eastern carpets and *objets d'art*, deriving mainly from the booty taken at the conquest of Palmyra [5]. In this way, Aurelian granted Deus Sol Invictus a State cult in a State temple, built on public ground rather than, as in the time of Elagabalus, in the private imperial gardens.

The dedication of the temple was performed with suitably important sacrifices [6], but with no hint of the immoral fanaticism or Syrian orgies that had once repelled the Roman population.

As Aurelian had foreseen, the building and maintenance of the temple were very costly, and he therefore took special measures and provided special sources of income [7].

[1] There is considerable controversy as to wether the temple to the sun was really built on the *Campus Agrippae*. L. Homo (*op. cit.*, p. 185, note 2) evaluated the various opinions and came to the following conclusion: the temple was located in Regio VIIa (*Chronogr. Ann.* 345, p. 148 of the Mommsen edition: ... *hic muro Urbem cinxit, templum Solis et Castra in Campo Agrippae dedicavit*...) in the vicinity of the *castra urbana* and the *forum suarium* (cf. *Historia Augusta, Vita Aureliani*, I, 3; Strabo, V, 236). An inscription (*CIL* VI, 1785) pertaining to the wine stored in the porticos of the sun temple was found at the present Piazza San Silvestro, but this does not constitute proof that the temple was located there. All that is known is that the temple was built on the eastern part of the Field of Mars, between the Via Flaminia and the Pincio.

[2] *Historia Augusta, Vita Aureliani*, 48, 4: *in porticibus templi Solis fiscalia vina ponuntur, non gratuito populo errogando, sed pretio.*

[3] *Ibid.*, 39, 2; Zosimos, I, 61. [4] Zosimos, I, 61.

[5] *Ibid.*; *Historia Augusta, Vita Aureliani*, 28, 5: *Tunc allatae vestes, quas in templo Solis videmus, consertae gemmis, tunc Persici dracones et tiarae.*

[6] *Historia Augusta, Vita Aureliani*, 39, 6; Zosimos, I, 61.

[7] *Ibid.*, 35, 3: *decrevit etiam emolumenta sartis tectis et ministris.*

In addition to building this great temple, Aurelian instituted the *agon Solis*, games dedicated to Deus Sol Invictus, to be held in Rome every four years [1]. These celebrations were also an innovation—not, of course, the games themselves, which were common in Roman public life, but the special honouring of this particular sun god by means of ceremonial games that were typically Roman. These games and celebrations were first held in Rome in A.D. 274, undoubtedly on the occasion of the dedication of the new temple [2]. The *agon Solis* bore no ressemblance to the annual games held immediately after the *Saturnalia* [3], a festival celebrated from the 17th to 19th December. The *Fasti* of Philocalus for A.D. 354 give December 25th as the *Dies Natalis Invicti*, and on this day circus games were also held, *Circenses missus XXX* [4]. These *Fasti* also record a series of games dedicated to the sun god, held from the 14th to the 11th day before the *kalendae* of November (i.e. 19-22 October). The games held on the 22nd of October were especially splendid. This was probably the day marking the anniversary of the religious reform instituted by Aurelian as well as the day on which the *agones Solis* were held every fourth year [5].

c. *The third phase*

The founding and organization of a new college of *Pontifices*

With the official appointment of Deus Sol Invictus as first deity of the Empire, the building of a suitable temple, and the organization of the *agones Solis*, the emperor's work was not yet complete: the last phase of his religious reform still lay before him. His objective had virtually been reached: he had given the Romans a syncretic sun god and defined the special doctrines of the cult, and he had given them one of the most splendid temples in Rome and a new series of typically Roman ceremonial games. But he had not

[1] Chronogr. of 354 (*ed.* Mommsen), p. 148: *Agonem Solis instituit*; *Chronica St. Hieronymi, ad annum Abrah.* 2291 (*ed.* Schöne), p. 185: *Primus Agon Solis ab Aureliano constitutus*; Iulianus, *Orationes*, IV, 115 B, p. 201 (*ed.* Hertlein).

[2] *Chronica St. Hieronymi, ibid.*

[3] Mentioned by Iulianus, *op. cit.*, IV, 156 B, p. 202.

[4] *CIL* I², p. 338: VIII K(al) Ian.: *Natalis Invicti Circenses Missus XXX.*

[5] L. Home, *Essai sur le règne de l'empereur Aurélien*, p. 186, note 7.

yet established a college of priests to ensure the continuation of the cult.

Aurelian had adapted so many elements to form the cult of Deus Sol Invictus that it bore the features of a new religion. It was precisely for this reason that the offices of the cult, which had now become the official cult of the Empire, could not be allowed to fall within the province of any existing college of priests—neither that of the *pontifices* nor that of the *Quindecemviri sacris faciundis*, and certainly not one of lower rank. Therefore, Aurelian established an new college of high priests [1], under the name *Pontifices Dei Solis* [2]. This new body was independent of the old college and at least its equal in status. The members of the old college accepted this event without much enthusiasm, and soon assumed longer names, i.e. *Pontifex Maior* [3] and later even *Pontifex (Deae) Vestae* [4], to distinguish them from the new *pontifices*.

In order to emphasize the ritual character and enhance the prestige of the new college, the *pontifices Dei Solis*, like the old *pontifices*, were usually chosen from among the senators, mainly from among the *praetoriani* and the *consulares*, all of whom were *clarissimi viri*. For most of the *pontifices Dei Solis* known to us, however, it is impossible to determine at what point in their *cursus honorum* they became members of the college. The earliest known *pontifex Dei Solis* is Virius Lupus [5], who was consul in 278 and then *praefectus Urbi* until 280. Together with him, M. Iunius Priscillia-

[1] *Historia Augusta, Vita Aureliani*, 35, 3: *Sacerdotia composuit, templum Solis fundavit et pontificibus roboravit.* The word *pontificibus* gives interpretational difficulties, *cf.* L. Homo, *op. cit.*, p. 187, note 1; K. Latte, *Römische Religionsgeschichte*, p. 350.

[2] *cf. CIL* VI, 501, 846, 1397, 1418, 1778, 31775, etc.

[3] *CIL* VI, 501: *Q. Clodius Flavianus .... pontifex maior ...*; *Ibid.*, 1741: *Honori Memmio Vitrasio Orfito ... pontifici maiori Vestae ...*; *L'Année Epigraphique*, 1964, p. 88, n° 223: *L. Caesonio Ovinio Manlio Rufiano Basso clarissimo viro, consuli II, pontifici maiori, pontifici dei Solis, salio palatino, praefecto Urbi, comiti Augustorum .. electo a divo Probo, patrono praestantissimo Caesonius Achilleus libertus posuit.*

[4] *CIL* VI, 1778: *Vettio Agorio Praetextato, ... pontifici Vestae ...*; *ibid.*, 1739: *Honori Memmio Vitrasio Orfito ... pontifici Vestae ...*; Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, I, 17, 1: *C. Iulio Rufiniano ... pontifici Vestae Matris....*

[5] *CIL* VI, 31775 = *Bolletino della Commissione archeologica di Roma*, 1887, p. 225.

nus[1] and L. Aelius Helvius Dionysus[2] were admitted to this college of high priests after serving as *praetor*. Memmius Vitrasius Orfitus[3] became a *pontifex Dei Solis* after his consulship. We also know the names of the following high priests of this sun god: L. Caesonius Ovinius Bassus[4], who was still *pontifex* during the reign of emperor Probus (A.D. 276-282), Iunius Postumianus[5], L. Crepereius Rogatus[6], T. Flavius Postumius Titianus[7], C. Vettius Cosinius Rufinus[8], Clodius Flavianus[9]. C. Rufius Volusianus[10], Iunius Gallienus[11], Celsius Titianus[12], and perhaps one of the most distinguished figures of the late fourth century, Vettius Agorius Praetextatus[13], who was municipal prefect of Rome from 367 to 369 and died as prefect of the Praetorian Guard in A.D. 384. Together with Symmachus and Macrobius, he was an idealistic defender of the old Roman pagan tradition. Besides fulfilling a number of important military and administrative functions, he also held important offices in the great pagan cults, which in his time were forced to draw on individuals of increasing incompetence from pagan circles.

The fact that all these high priests of the sun god belonged to the most aristocratic families was an important factor not only in Romanizing the character of the cult but also in maintaining and perpetuating this specific character.

The college of *Pontifices Dei Solis* was active during the period in which syncretism flourished. What emerges more and more as a sign of the times is the holding of multiple priesthoods. Owing to

[1] *Ephemeris Epigraphica*, IX, n° 594: *M. I. Priscilliano, pontifici maiori... pontifici Dei Solis* ....

[2] *CIL* VI, 1673: *L. Aelio Helvio Dionysio,....pontifici Dei Solis* ....

[3] *Ibid.*, 1741: *Memmio Vitrasio Orfito ... Pontifici Dei Solis* ....

[4] *L'Année Épigraphique*, 1964, p. 88, n° 223 (*cf.* p. 145, note 3).

[5] *CIL* VI, 2151.

[6] *Ibid.*, 1397.

[7] *Ibid.*, 1418.

[8] *CIL* X, 5061.

[9] *CIL* VI, 501.

[10] *Ibid.*, 846.

[11] *CIL* XIV, 2082.

[12] The brother of the orator Q. Aurelius Symmachus, known from one of his letters, cf. Symmachus, Epistulae, I, 68.

[13] *CIL* VI, 1778.

many different circumstances, personages who already held some kind of priesthood found themselves forced to accept offices in other cults to prevent the decay and disappearance of militant paganism. This state of affairs is also an indication of the degree to which syncretism had penetrated by the end of the third and particularly in the fourth century. The syncretic monotheism of Deus Sol Invictus had gathered the other cults to it but had not put an end to them. This explains why the *pontifices Dei Solis* were usually members of more than one college of priests, even of the old college of high priests, or accepted one of the degrees on initiation of Mithraism [1]. Furthermore, inscriptions probably dating from after the rule of Aurelian usually bear a dedication to one or more gods that strikes us as being syncretistic in type. Deus Sol Invictus has an honourable place, before or after Iuppiter Optimus Maximus, with whom he was to a certain degree identified, and preceding other gods [2]. From then on, the gods of the heavens were seen only as various facets of a primal sun god. We thus have a dedication to the *Ignibus Aeternis* (Sol and Luna) made by a *praefectus preatorio*, Iulius Placidianus [3].

The college of *Pontifices Dei Solis* was in the hands of Aurelian a pre-eminently suitable instrument for bringing his religious revolution to a successful conclusion. It is still virtually impossible for us to give an accurate description of the organization and internal relationship of this new college, or to determine how many members it had and whether the emperor himself was its head. It is clear,

[1] For example, Iunius Postumianus was *Pontifex Dei Solis* at the same time as he was *Pater Patrum Dei Solis Invicti Mithrae* and *XV vir sacris faciundis*; L. Crepereius Rogatus was at once *VII vir epulonum* and *Lupercus*; M. Iunius Priscillianus *Vates Primarius* and *Pontifex maior*; T. Flavius Postumius Titianus was also *augur*; C. Vettius Cossinius Rufinus *augur* and *Salius Palatinus*; Memmius Vitrasius Orfitus *Pontifex Deae Vestae* and *XV vir sacris faciundis*; C. Rufius Volusianus *Pater Ierofanta* and *profeta Isidis* and Vettius Agorius Praetextatus was *augur, Pontifex Vestae, XV vir sacris faciundis, Curialis Herculis, sacratus Libero et Eleusinis, Ierofanta, Neocorus, Tauroboliatus* and *Pater Sacrorum*.

[2] *Corpus Inscriptionum Rhenarum*, n° 55: *Iovi Optimo Maximo, summo exsuperantissimo, Soli Invicto, Apollini, Lunae, Dianae, Fortunae, Marti, Victoriae, Paci ... antistius Adventus, legatus Augusti propraetore dat.*

[3] *CIL* XII, 1551: *Ignibus Aeternis, Iulius Placidianus, vir clarissimus, praefectus praetorio, ex voto posuit.*

however, that Aurelian did not take a new title derived from the sun cult. Fifty years earlier, Elagabalus had placed his new title of *sacerdos amplissimus Dei Solis Elagabali* before that of *pontifex maximus*; in other words, he carried two titles. This was not the case for Aurelian, who bore only the title of *pontifex maximus* and as such led the old college of high priests. When he established the college of *pontifices Dei Solis* he did not take a new title, but circumstances permit the conclusion that as *pontifex* he was head of both of the two most important colleges. After all, it was he who was most aware of the possibilities and potential of the new college; he was the originator of the new sun cult and had defined its nature and objectives, and he was thus the most suitable person to lead in religious matters. The fact that no new priestly function was created shows the inspired caution with which Aurelian undertook all the changes he wished to bring about, including the religious reforms. A new title would inevitably have taken precedence over that of *pontifex*, which would certainly have led to friction with the most prominent Roman senatorial families, who would have seen it as a blow to their dignity. In addition, Aurelian also had a precedent for his conduct in the announcement by which Elagabalus had made the function of *sacerdos amplissimus* the most prominent.

When it was politic to do so, Aurelian preferred to leave things as they were. In furthering religious syncretism, he made everything equal, including the deities and the high priests who served them. His self-restraint in omitting to give himself a new title of this kind gave him an additional advantage. He could rest assured that the *pontifices Dei Solis* would ultimately lead religious life within the limits he himself had set when he announced his religious policies.

3. The essence of the new cult

We have emphasized the individual character of the cult and of the god Deus Sol Invictus. This individuality was determined by and can be judged from the personality and objectives of Aurelian.

Brought up to revere the sun god, Aurelian became even more devout in the course of his long military career. He consistently attributed his successes to the special favour of Sol Invictus, as his conduct at Emesa and later at Palmyra attests. When the time came

to complete his reorganization of the Empire with a religious reformation, the means lay close to hand, and he could draw his own conclusions from the lesson of Elagabalus. He believed that the main reason for the failure of Elagabalus' attempt at religious reform was that his deity and the ritual of the cult were alien, not only to Rome but to the entire western part of the Empire. Nevertheless, it would be an exaggeration to say that Elagabalus' policies were rejected merely because there were alien. The youthful Elagabalus was too fanatical and too hasty; his reforms could never have borne fruit. What remained, the rich sediment left behind by the cult of Sol Invictus Elagabal when the Eastern elements had been filtered out, was the most suitable material Aurelian could have found on which to base his cult of Deus Sol Invictus.

It should also be borne in mind that Aurelian's reforms, despite their religious motivation, also had appreciable political implications. It was Roman support of the cult, carefully as Aurelian adapted it to suit the Roman mentality, that turned it into a powerful political weapon. Aurelian was the reformer of an existing cult. He would never have succeeded in crowning his reformation and unification with a deity—even a sun god—and a cult that were solely the product of his own personal imagination. An invention of his own could never have given him the strenght necessary to overcome the many difficulties he was to encounter.

There was no trace of fanaticism in Aurelian's execution of his plan for the simple reason that the cult of Deus Sol Invictus was, as a State cult, also to a high degree a political, almost administrative reformation [1]. We must never lose sight of the fact that Aurelian, after he had established the material unification of the Empire, also intended to restore its moral unity.

In the course of the third century, the Roman Empire had passed through a moral and material crisis. The Eastern cults had shaken belief in the ancient Roman gods and robbed them of their capacity to support the devout. Christendom was in full development. The general religious trend was toward monotheism, not only locally but universally. Syncretism could not be other than subjective; in

[1] L. Homo, *op. cit.*, p. 189: "C'est avant tout une réforme politique, on pourrait presque dire administrative."

other words, each individual took what he wanted from the various cults to construct his own religious convictions. As a result, this syncretism was not the same thing for the masses as it was for the educated classes and philosophers. The many Baals of the East were finally assimilated into a single Sol [1]. Spontaneously, the elements having most in common were selected from various cults. Roman paganism gradually merged into a monotheism conceived under the general and concrete, the religious and philosophical form of the monotheism of the sun [2].

The crisis undergone by the Roman Empire in the material sense was no less violent. Aurelian had followed more than fifty emperors who legally bore the title of *imperator*. This rapid succession had rudely shaken the prestige of imperial authority. By his talented leadership, Aurelian had restored order. The last point on his programme was the attainment of moral unity, and this he accomplished by making the cult of Deus Sol Invictus the official cult of the Empire.

Surpassing all his expectations, the essential nature of the cult, which he had deliberately made abstract and left vague, was generally accepted. The Romans now considered it a truly Roman cult [3]. The sun god Elagabal was an Eastern, more specifically a Syrian deity, worshipped principally at Emesa under the symbol of a black stone and with very definite rites of his own [4]. Aurelian's Deus Sol Invictus was represented on the coins struck at this time, in the familiar anthropomorphic form [5]. His official name, as used by the high priests in their title *Pontifex Dei Solis*, was Deus Sol, but epigraphically he was indicated as Deus Sol Invictus [6]. The

[1] F. Richter, *Sol*, in *Roscher*, IV, p. 1147.

[2] V. Duruy, *La politique religieuse de Constantin* in *RA*, 1182, pp. 106-110; J. Réville, *La religion à Rome sous les Sévères*, pp. 104-126 and 284-293.

[3] A. von Domaszewski, *Religion des Römischen Heeres*, p. 35.

[4] F. Lenormant, *Sol Elagabalus* in *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions*, III (1881), pp. 310-322.

[5] H. Cohen, *Description historique des monnaies*, VI, p. 190, n° 178; *ibid.*, p. 178, n° 17; *ibid.*, p. 200, n° 228, etc.

[6] Accepted by L. Richter, *Sol* in *Roscher*, IV (see note 1); *invictus* also occurs on the coins, e.g. H. Cohen, *op. cit.*, VI, p. 201, n° 237 and n° 235. Also epigraphically, e.g. *CIL* VIII, 23924 (Numidia): *Deo Invicto Soli, pro salute Imperatoris Caesaris L. Domiti Aureliani ...*; *AE*, 1958, p. 58, n° 239.

epithet *invictus* was certainly no longer compromising, as Homo and Cumont, arguing on the basis of the earlier *damnatio memoriae* [1], consider it. For, as we have shown above, the *damnatio memoriae* applied to the emperor Elagabalus and did not apply primarily, and certainly not exclusively, to the Eastern god who bore the epithet *invictus*. This had undoubtedly been the case a century before Aurelian, but now, at the end of the third century, this epithet was in general use and given even to the most ancient Roman gods, for example Mars [2]. Aurelian was well aware of its powerful emotional effect [3].

The name Deus Sol Invictus cannot be said to militate against the syncretistic intention of the cult. We have already mentioned Zosimos' statement [4] that statues of Grecian Helios and Eastern Baal were placed in the temple in Rome. This was Aurelian's way of ensuring that the new cult was acceptable to all, irrespective of personal preference, including the devotees of the two main cults of the time, that of Mithras and that of Juppiter Optimus Maximus.

The universal appeal of the new cult was essential to Aurelian's plans. In addition, the new cult was to be official in character. The other Eastern cults in Rome, for example those of Mithras, Isis and Sarapis, the Baals, Juppiter Dolichenus, Juppiter Heliopolitanus, were never made official, and the cult of Sol Invictus Elagabal was official only as long as its high priest was emperor.

Aurelian made the new cult of the sun a State cult, and took every possible precaution to ensure that it remained so. He himself was not pre-eminently the priest of Deus Sol Invictus. This would have complicated the situation when it came to the succession, since this was no longer hereditary as it had been in the time of Elagabalus. Ostensibly, Aurelian placed the new cult on an equal footing with the traditional official cults. The *pontifices Dei Solis* had no more authority than the old *pontifices*, but certainly not less. It may not

[1] L. Homo, *Essai*, p. 190; F. Cumont, *MMM* II, p. 109.

[2] H. Cohen, *op. cit.*, VI, p. 189, n° 123: *Mars Invictus*.

[3] *cf.* p. 150, note 6: *CIL* VIII, 23924 from Numidia; *ibid.*, 5143 dates from A.D. 275 and reads: *Soli Invicto sacrum, pro salute et incolumitate perpetui Imperatoris Caesaris L. Domiti Aureliani, pii felicis augusti, pontificis maximi, tribuniciae potestatis VI* .....

[4] Zosimos, I, 61, 2.

be concluded that the authority of the old *pontifices* must have been greater because they assumed the title *pontifices maiores* just at this time. This title was solely a means of differentiation, as is shown by the fact that it was changed to *pontifices Deae Vestae* a half century later.

From the foregoing description of the cult of Deus Sol Invictus it will not be difficult to see that, from the political point of view, this cult set the seal on Aurelian's efforts to establish centralization and coordination. The Roman State had again become one; it had a leader, the emperor, and a single god to protect it, the sun god Deus Sol Invictus. The sun god was the *comes* and *conservator*. The emperor shared the nature of this god, and was therefore eternal so that his authority was absolute and inviolable. This was the ultimate accomplishment of Aurelians' plan: the sun cult, instituted as the State cult, fortified imperial authority and justified his despotism.

Aurelian exploited all the possible implications of this situation. He was the first emperor to take the title *Deus* during his lifetime. Caligula and Commodus had been content to use only the name of a god. Domitian had attempted to have himself called *dominus et deus*, but these titles never occur on official documents or monuments [1]. Of all the emperors, Aurelian was the first official god on earth. As early as the victory of Fanum Fortunae in A.D. 271 he was called *consors* of Hercules [2]. In itself this was not unusual. The cult of Hercules, which was based on the undisputed deification of a human hero and which had long been accepted in the Graeco-Roman world, was used as an example to justify the cult of the deified emperors even since the time of Augustus and even since the recognition of the apotheosis of Caesar [3]. Aurelian's innovation was to have himself called a god officially.

[1] E. Beurlier, *Essai sur le culte rendu aux Empereurs Romains*, Paris 1891, p. 51; S. Gsell, *Essai sur le règne de l'empereur Domitien*, Paris 1893, pp. 50-52.

[2] *CIL* XI, 6308: *Herculi Augusto, consorti Domini Nostri Aureliani* . . . . In the third century Hercules was regarded as the defender of the Empire against the barbarians and the natural protector of the emperors in war, *cf.* J. de Witte, *De quelques empereurs qui ont pris les attributs d'Hercule* in *Revue Numismatique* (1845) pp. 266-274.

[3] J. Cochez, *De verklaringen van Romeinse plaatsnamen in Aeneis VIII* in *Philologische Studiën*, 6 (1934-1935), p. 222.

Although they are difficult to date exactly, various inscriptions contain dedications to Deus Aurelianus [1]. On two coins struck to commemorate the unification of the Empire in A.D. 274-275, Aurelian bears the significant titles of *Deus Aurelianus et Dominus* [2]. One side carries a bust of the emperor, crowned with a laurel wreath and wearing a breast-plate, with the text *Deo et Domino nato Aureliano Augusto*. The other shows a standing woman offering Aurelian a crown; Aurelian is shown in military dress with a laurel wreath on his head and a lance in his hand. The text reads *Restitutori Orbis*. Aurelian is a god (*deus*) on earth and absolute master (*dominus*); he is a descendant of the sun god by birth (*natus*). He took these titles officially in A.D. 274, when Deus Sol Invictus was made *Dominus Imperii Romani* [3]. These texts are correlative and supplement each other.

In this connection we may point out that Aurelian was also the first emperor to wear all the external attributes of his divine capacity and power in public, for instance the diadem and the cape ornamented with gold and precious stones [4].

He was firmly convinced that the *imperium* could only be saved from desintegration by an absolute monarchy, which would prevent the recurrence of military anarchy. He made this kind of monarchy a reality by establishing the cult of Deus Sol Invictus, as an immediate consequence of which his subjects regarded him as one with the sun god, in other words as a *Roi Soleil* [5]. The most immediate consequence of the monotheism of the sun was thus the religious unity of the Empire and the deification of the emperor in his lifetime. The despotism first instituted by the Severi drew its support from

[1] *CIL* XI, 556, from the time of Probus or Carus: *quam Deus Aurelianus concesserat.* Also *CIL* II, 3832: *Deo Aureliano*; *Bull Arch.* (1894), p. 342, n° 11: *Divo Aureliano Augusto*; *ibid.*, (1887), p. 57, n° 31: *Perpetuo Imperatori L. Domitio Aureliano*; *CIL* VIII, 4877: *Deo Aureliano res publica coloniae Tubursicitanae*, from the time of his rule in Numidia.

[2] H. Cohen, *op. cit.*, VI, p. 197, n° 200: *Deo et Domino nato Aureliano.*

[3] L. Homo., *op. cit.*, p. 192 and note 5.

[4] Cited by L. Homo; Victor, *Epitome*, 35, 5: *Iste primus apud Romanos diadema capiti innexuit, gemmisque et aurata omni veste, quod adhuc fere incognitum Romanis moribus videbatur, usus est.* Elagabalus wore it only within the palace, *cf. Historia Augusta, Vita Heliogabali*, 23, 5.

[5] A. Groag, *Domitius Aurelianus* in *RE*, V, p. 1405; G. Herzog-Hauser, *Kaiserkult* in *RE*, suppl. IV, p. 849.

the army and the populace. The army, which before this time had murdered or enthroned emperors according to the whim of the moment, was now restrained by a firm hand and submitted to the reins. From then on, they accepted the sun god of Aurelian as their protecting god. The inconstant and rebellious, fanatic and demanding populace was satisfied by the reforms and the food distributions. The emperor's despotism no longer had any serious opposition to fear.

For some time it seemed as though Aurelian's religious reforms would endure, and that the cult would survive by virtue of its character, its Roman orientation, and the increasing number of adherents it attracted. But in the end it was to disintegrate in the face of the unrelenting opposition of Christianity, which ultimately, thanks to its inflexible strength, caused the downfall of Paganism.

Initially, Aurelian had not seen Christianity as a disturbing factor. He thought he had left sufficient leeway for the Christians within the framework of the cult of Deus Sol Invictus: all they had to do was to make the same measure of adjustment as the adherents to the ancient Roman cults, for whose beliefs he had provided in the national system. Nevertheless, he misjudged the Christians; they would never be able to agree to all he wished the cult of the sun to accomplish for him with such immediate effect and certainly not to the identification of the emperor with the deity. The Christians could not but refuse to worship the person of the emperor as this religious concept required, the emperor being an emanation of the sun god, and thus a divine and supernatural being. The emperor soon realized that Christianity was out of place in the syncretism of the sun god and therefore formed a threat to his religious policies. It is therefore hardly surprising that the decided to resume the persecution [1]. He sent his provincial governors orders to this effect, but before the edict could be carried out he was murdered at the instigation of his servant Mnesteus [2] at Caenophrurium, a place between Perinthos and Byzantium, at the end of August or beginning of September, A.D. 275.

These political events did not have the least influence on the

[1] L. Homo, *op. cit.*, p. 195.

[2] *Historia Augusta, Vita Aureliani*, 35, 5-36; Zonaras, XII, 27 gives the servant's name as Eros.

religious reform shaped by Aurelian. After a brief interregnum, Probus continued the policies of Aurelian, as did the emperors who came after him, all of whom valued the merits of Aurelian's programme and were able to draw the necessary conclusions for themselves. Tacitus even ordered the portrait of Aurelian to be given a place of honour in every private home [1].

Up to the conversion of Constantine the Great, the cult of Deus Sol Invictus received the full support of the emperors. The many coins showing the sun god that these emperors struck provide official evidence of this. For half a century the monotheism of the sun god had had the time and opportunity to form a sound foundation on which to develop further, with the result that, even after Aurelian himself was no longer there to lend his official support, it continued to flourish for a considerable time.

The objectives of Aurelian had been reached; his reforms ushered in the era of the sun god.

The cult of Deus Sol Invictus completely satisfied the religious convictions of the Romans. From the end of the third century on, religious syncretism, perfectly embodied by the cult of Deus Sol Invictus, was the ideal of both the masses and the intellectuals.

4. Deus Sol Invictus is a true Roman sun god

The true nature of Deus Sol Invictus has been described in many highly divergent ways. It is generally accepted that this deity was a predominantly Eastern sun god, but there is no agreement as to which of the Eastern deities is to be considered in this respect.

The statement of Marquardt [2] that it was *Sol Invictus Elagabal* whom Aurelian, as it were, restored to honour after the victory near Emesa, cannot be accepted uncritically. The restoration and embellishment of the Emesa temple certainly occurred, other temples were built in honour of this god, and splendid sacrifices were made, because Aurelian was convinced that it was due to the special intervention of this deity that he had conquered Zenobia [3].

[1] G. Herzog-Hauser, *Kaiserkult* in *RE*, suppl. IV, p. 849.

[2] J. Marquardt, *Staatsverwaltung*, III[3], p. 83.

[3] *Historia Augusta, Vita Aureliani*, 25, 3: ... *ad templum Heliogabali tetendit, quasi communi officio vota soluturus. Verum illic eam formam numinis repperit, quam in bello sibi faventem vidit.*

But this was all. Notwithstanding the fact that the cult of *Sol Invictus Elagabal* had continued to exist, albeit in a much more restrained form than during the reign of Elagabalus, the *damnatio memoriae* had removed the official character of the cult. In addition, the cult of Emesa was too local and too strict in its doctrines to evoke the overwhelming enthusiasm that the cult of Deus Sol Invictus inspired. If one accepts that the new cult was only a resumption of the cult of Sol Invictus at Emesa, then the question, why Aurelian set up a college of *pontifices Dei Solis* to serve his sun cult, and not a college of *sacerdotes* as it was established in Emesa, still remains to be answered. The only explanation is that the deity of Aurelian was not the same god as Sol Invictus of Emesa. Indeed, this conclusion is strengthened if one considers that Aurelian did not take a new title to show his special quality in the new cult. The quality and title of *pontifex maximus* were sufficient. This was not so in the case of Elagabalus, who placed the new title *sacerdos amplissimus Dei Solis Invicti* higher than that of *pontifex maximus*.

Aurelian did not simply take over the sun cult of Emesa. What he did was to take its core, its quintessence, and rework it into a system of his own, inspired by the cult of Emesa. Indeed, it would not be going too far to say that by the end of the third century all the sun cults or cults with analogous elements, such as that of Mithras, had come to approach each other rather closely.

The contention of Wissowa and Richter [1] that Deus Sol Invictus may be identified with the sun of Palmyra, Sol Malachbelus or Sol Sanctissimus, cannot be accepted, either. Their argumentation is based on the close relationship between the building of the temple to the sun and the victory at Palmyra, which is thought to have provided Aurelian with the necessary monies. They also adduce Aurelian's order to rebuild the temple destroyed by his troops, and lastly the presence of the statue of the Eastern Baal which was, according to Zosimos, placed in the temple at Rome [2].

This theory does not offer more difficulty than the preceding one; it may be discarded as erroneous. The cult of Palmyra, like that of

[1] G. Wissowa, *Religion und Kultus der Römer*, pp. 366-367; F. Richter, *Sol* in *Roscher*, IV, p. 1147.

[2] Zosimos, I, 61, 2.

Emesa, was too narrow and too local to fulfil the needs of Aurelian. He did indeed have the temple at Palmyra restored and had sacrifices dedicated to Sol Malachbel, but this gesture arose from his deep attachment to the sun god, and his wish to respect the many ways in which the sun was worshipped. If this was the cult that Aurelian established in Rome and of which he made a State cult, why then did he send high priests from Rome to dedicate the temple after it had been rebuilt? [1] Furthermore, the Baal occupied a place of lesser importance among the statues of other gods. The fact that the symbol of this Palmyrene sun god had a secondary place, together with the sun god of the Greek Pantheon, shows that neither may be identified with the lord and master of the *sanctuarium* in Rome. Since Roman *pontifices* were sent to Palmyra to inaugurate the temple, there cannot, in our opinion, be any question even of a restoration of the Palmyrene cult but only of an institution following the Roman model. Why else should high priests be sent to a place where priests of his own could perform the inauguration according to the local ritual far better if all that was concerned was an inauguration? [2]

Habel defends still another point of view, and argues that we must here accept the official appointment of Mithraism as State cult [3]. To the objections raised by Cumont [4] and Wissowa [5], the following arguments can be added. The cult of Mithras was never official; on this point the historians are in agreement [6]. The doctrine and the mysteries, the cult sites and the priests of Persian Mithras in no way resemble those of the cult of Deus Sol Invictus. The decisive evidence for the difference between the two is the fact that their respective priesthood used different titles. As the same inscriptions contain both the title of *pater patrum dei Solis Invicti Mithrae* and that of *pontifex Dei Solis*, it is impossible that

[1] *Historia Augusta, Vita Aureliani*, 31, 7-9.

[2] The same opinion is held by J. Noiville, *Les origines du Natalis Invicti* in *REA*, XXXVIII (1936), pp. 168 f.

[3] P. Habel, *Zur Geschichte des Sonnenkultes in Rom*, Strasbourg 1889, pp. 97 f.

[4] F. Cumont, *MMM* I, p. 337.

[5] G. Wissowa, *Religion und Kultus der Römer*, München 1912², p. 367.

[6] F. Cumont, *op. cit.*, p. 241.

only one function can be meant [1]. The same is true for the lower ranks of the priesthood of the cult of Mithras and that of *pontifex Dei Solis* [2]. Had the two cults been identical, it would have been superfluous to distinguish between the titles of their chief priests. It is consequently, in our opinion, abundantly clear that the official deity of the Empire, called Deus Sol Invictus by Aurelian, can in no way have been Persian Mithras. At this moment in history, Deus Sol Invictus was, even as a true Roman deity, much more important than Mithras himself.

There is therefore every reason to conclude that the cult of Deus Sol Invictus, which influenced the lives of all pagan Romans in the third and fourth centuries, had a purely Roman character and was a re-creation for which the genius of Aurelian was largely responsible. This is why Aurelian's plan succeeded and why the cult of Deus Sol Invictus was made the national cult. Elagabalus had attempted to achieve the same ends fifty years earlier, but his expectations were not fulfilled. Nevertheless, his decision and actions demonstrated to all who could understand the importance of the cult of the invincible sun god, which had never until then been at all prominent.

When, in A.D. 274, Aurelian acclaimed Deus Sol Invictus *dominus imperii Romani*, had a splendid temple built, instituted a new college of high priests, established the *agon Solis*, and introduced thirty chariot races on the *dies Natalis Invicti*, i.e. the 25th of December, he succeeded beyond his expectations. Not only because his method was different and the times more favourable, but also because of the special nature of the god and the cult.

There is 'ittle material that contributes to a description of this "special nature" [3]. The only data on the cult available to us are the indications of the calendar of Philocalus for the 25th of December: *Dies Natalis Invicti; circenses missus XXX* [4], from which we can

[1] *CIL* VI, 2151: *Iunio Postumio, viro clarissimo, patri patrum Dei Solis Invicti Mithrae, XV viro sacris faciundis, pontifici Dei Solis, ordo sacerdotum magistro suo, curante et dedicante Flavio Herculeo, viro religiosissimo.*

[2] *CIL* VI, 1779: .. *Vettius Agorius Praetextatus, augur, pontifex Vestae, pontifex Dei Solis, quindecemvir, curialis Herculis, sacratus Libero et Eleusiniis, hierophanta, neocorus, tauroboliatus, pater patrum in re publica vero* . . . .

[3] J. Noiville, *Les origines du Natalis Invicti* in *REA*, XXXVIII (1936), pp. 144-176.

[4] *CIL* I², p. 388.

infer that on that day thirty chariot races were run in the honour of Deus Sol Invictus.

The origin of the *dies Natalis Invicti* [1] as the feast of the birth of the sun on the winter solstice is explained in various ways by the historians of religion, most of whom reject a Roman origin. Noiville attempted to determine the source from which it was borrowed [2]. His study of the winter solstice celebrations in Syria and Egypt led him to conclude that neither was the source of the Roman celebration. A distinction must therefore be made between the feast day *Natalis Invicti* and the other celebrations held in the circus in honour of Deus Sol Invictus.

Deus Sol Invictus and the circus games were specifically Roman. The priests of the sun god were *pontifices*, the celebrations on the 25th of December consisted mainly of races between chariots, the protection of which had been the responsibility of the sun god since ancient times. The great care given by Aurelian to the form and content of the cult is one more indication that he wished to stress its Roman character.

Seen in this light, it seems to us that the feast of *Natalis Invicti* in Rome must be seen not only as the anniversary of the birth of the sun but should also be related to the anniversary of the dedication of the temple of the sun. This time was chosen because it is one of the most dramatic moments in the sun's course. For the Romans, the winter solstice was much more important than the summer solstice [3].

How did Aurelian visualize the relationship of Deus Sol Invictus to the other gods? The emperor and reformer certainly did everything possible to illustrate and stress the purely Roman character of his religion, but this did not directly solve the problem of the relationship to the other gods. The creation of this sun god was not entirely the result of Aurelian's creative ability. In addition to the

[1] H. Usener, *Sol Invictus* in *Rh. Mus.*, LX (1905), pp. 466-491; H. Usener, *Das Weihnachtsfest*, Bonn 1911², pp. 348; F. Cumont, *MMM* I, p. 342; Julianus, *Orationes* IV, 156 B.C.

[2] J. Noiville, *op. cit.*, pp. 147-166.

[1] J. Noiville, *op. cit.*, p. 175; Varro even estimates from Bruma to Bruma, i.e. from one wintersolstice to the next, in *De Lingua Latina*, VI, 8: *tempus a bruma ad brumam dum Sol redit vocatur annus.*

material he borrowed and adapted from the cult of *Sol Invictus Elagabal*, he included fundamental elements deriving from purely Roman models, among them the mode of representation of the sun god himself. One of these elements is illustrated on a golden diadem showing a series of thirteen Roman deities, among whom Deus Sol Invictus occupies the most important central place [1]. From this, certain conclusions may be drawn concerning the position the emperor assigned to his sun god.

This diadem is a piece of Syrian work found in Laodicea, and belongs to the last period of the third century of our era. In the middle portion, Deus Sol Invictus is shown under a triangular motif. Around the head of this deity, which is shown full-face, is an aureole, below it is the familar four-horse chariot, two of the horses facing left and the other two right. This type of representation was not uncommon in late classical art, but this was not true for Syria, where the local sun god was portrayed in the local style. The motifs on Syrian coins include the sacred stone or the eagle, or both together (*cf.* Sol Invictus Elagabal). In Palmyra, one of the motifs was Sol Malachbelus fully armed. Emesa had its sacred stone, other places their *baityloi* on which the sun and the moon were carved. In Hierapolis a sun god identified with Apollo was worshipped. This god was beared and wore armour, like the Palmyrene gods, with the *kalathos* on his head. Macrobius [2] described this cult representation with all its attributes, and explained it in his own way. There are also invocations to the sun god under two hands, represented on coins.

The representation on the diadem shows that the subject must have derived from a different region and been brought to Syria. Serdica, where the coins were usually minted, gave form to the religious ideas of Aurelian in a very special way. The motifs of the sun god as ruler over the Empire and protector of the emperor, and

[1] F. Altheim, *Die Soldatenkaiser*, Frankfurt 1939, pp. 281-284, in which there is a description of a golden diadem showing thirteen gods. In 1938 A.D. this diadem was in the shop of an art dealer in Aleppo (Syria); it was 23 cm. long and 2,1 cm. high; except for a break on the right-hand side it was in good condition. For the sake of completeness, the description and discussion are given in translation.

[2] Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, I, 17, pp. 16 f.

of the latter as the proxy and earthly counterpart of his divine master, occur repeatedly in varying forms on the coins. On some Sol is shown full-face with aureole and four-horse chariot. This representation occupies a unique place among Aurelian coins. The agreement with the diadem extends to the details, and it seems almost certain that the Syrian goldsmith who made the diadem must have taken such a coin as a model.

The only possible conclusion is that this Syrian representation showed the new Deus Sol Invictus of Aurelian. This would seem to give the work of this individual artist a more far-reaching importance, which is confirmed by a closer inspection of the other parts of the diadem. On either side of the sun god there is a row of standing deities. Together they form a single group comprising the twelve old gods, among whom Apollo, Mars, Venus and others can be distinguished.

Among these twelve gods, Aurelian's Deus Sol Invictus was the thirteenth. This case of a thirteenth god was recurrent in Classical religion, especially in the ruler cults. In the fixed series of the Olympian Twelve, the deified ruler or the ruler closely related to the gods occurs as a thirteenth figure. Philip II of Macedonia had a statue of himself carried as the thirteenth figure in a ceremonial procession. In the opening lines of his *Georgics*, Virgil included Augustus in the same manner. Hadrian was represented in the same way in Kyzikos. After his death, Alexander Severus was shown together with the Olympians as thirteenth figure. As early as the end of the third century, the Lykian stones showing twelve gods and the portrait of the emperor were in fashion.

On the diadem the Aurelian's Deus Sol Invictus is, significantly, given the same important place. This god was the ruler of the earth and the divine commander of the emperor; he was at the same time, in Aurelian's view, the divine exponent of the emperorship. This did not in itself imply that he was raised in rank above the other gods, but it indicated, in a very special manner, the close tie to the empire and world dominion. The latter gave the new deity an exceptional place. Even in Syria itself, therefore, this image of Deus Sol Invictus, which was essentially Roman, challenged the representations of the local sun god.

This instance of influence of the Roman Deus Sol Invictus in the East is not an isolated one. We have already mentioned other data and elements, for instance, that *pontifices* were sent from Roma to Palmyra to dedicate the rebuilt temple there. The college of *pontifices Dei Solis* stepped in to establish order and performed this function in all cults.

Deus Sol Invictus was official and universal, his cult formed the link between the peoples of the Empire and therefore flourished and was accepted as no cult had ever been before. Anyone could call himself an adherent of it. Above all, however, this cult served the political ends of the emperors. The measure of Aurelian's success in realizing his plan and having a cult of the sun god accepted by the conservative Romans, is shown by the concepts expressed by Julian in the fourth century, especially in his oration on the *Helios Basileus*, the sun king, Julian reduced all mythology and religion to the service of the sun god, Helios, the direct master of Mithras, who nevertheless received the main emphasis [1].

5. The cult of Deus Sol Invictus after Aurelian

The revival of the cult of the sun in the form of the cult of Deus Sol Invictus endured because it satisfied two conditions posed by the experienced Aurelian: it answered the religious needs of the time and it served the political objectives of the emperor. As a result it met with extraordinary favour among both Aurelian's successors and the citizens of the Empire in general.

Since we lack complete and definitive information about the dogma of this cult, we must rely on the scarce indirect evidence. The main theme of the dogma of this sun cult was undoubtedly the ancient struggle between the powers of light and darkness, which was repeatedly won by the god of light, in this case the sun god. This invincibility he shared with his followers when they earned his special protection through personal sacrifices and an unshakable

[1] G. Mau, *Die Religionsphilosophie Kaiser Julians in seinen Reden auf den König Helios und die Göttermutter*, Leipzig 1907; J. Maurice, *La dynastie solaire des seconds Flaviens* in *RA* (1911), I, pp. 377-406; G. Wissowa, *op. cit.*, p. 368; L. Bidez, *La vie de l'empereur Julien*, Paris 1930 (Dutch translation, *Keizer Julianus, de ondergang van het antieke Heidendom*, Utrecht 1958).

belief in the invincibility and continuous protection of the deity. It seems to us that around these central doctrines a rather haphazard collection of tenets and regulations was assembled by Aurelian and the *pontifices*, all drawn from the still vital, analogous cult with which the emperor in particular had been familiar since his childhood. This led to the construction of a comprehensive system of borrowed elements, with the result—as intended—that the other gods became involved, fertilized the doctrines of Deus Sol Invictus, and were ultimately incorporated, either in subservience to him or identified with him. The sun god became the haven for all who sought strenght and solace, and he was served and revered according to the old Roman rituals.

To form an impression of the distribution of this cult, we have at our disposal a relatively small number of datable epigraphic texts from the period after Aurelian, as well as a few dedications to *pontifices Dei Solis* [1]. These scanty data nevertheless permit us to draw the conclusion that the cult of this sun god was still practised at the end of the fourth century. The temple in Roma continued to be used, and others were built in other parts of the Empire [2]; the college of high priests continued to function.

The paucity of epigraphic texts is to some extent compensated by the evidence provided by the coins of the emperors of the end of the third and of the fourth century. These frequently bear not only the text *Soli Invicto Conservatori* in all possible variations, but also a representation of the sun god himself. The successive emperors were well aware of the extent to which this cult of the sun god lent support to their policies, and they spared no pains to keep the cult of Deus Sol Invictus flourishing.

Probus (A.D. 276-282) continued the policies of his predecessor

[1] Dated dedications to Deus Sol Invictus include: *CIL* VIII, 1329 from 276-282; *CIL* V, 803 from 286-305; *CIL* VIII, 14688 from 304-321 and 8713 from 315-316; *ARW*, XI (1901), 232. Dated inscriptions dedicated to a *pontifex Dei Solis*: *CIL* VI, 501 and 1778; from the end of the fourth century also *CIL* VI, 1779, 2151, 846, 1397, 1418, etc.

[2] A temple to the sun god was built at Comum during the rule of Diocletian and Maximian (284-305), *cf. AE*, 1914, 370, n° 249: *Templum Dei Solis iussu Dominorum Nostrorum Diocletiani et Maximiani Augustorum, Titus Flavius Postumus Titianus, vir clarissimus, . . . perfecit ac dedicavit . . .*

Aurelian unchanged. There is a dedication dating from his reign bearing the complete name of the sun god *Deus Sol Invictus* [1].

It might seem as though the representation of the sun god was neglected on the coins struck during the short rule of Tacitus (A.D. 275-276); these show Jupiter presenting the globe of the earth to the emperor [2], but with the text *Providentia Deorum* the sun god occurs repeatedly with the globe in his left hand and his right hand raised, opposite the *Fides militum* with one or two legionary symbols [3]. There is also a medaillon of this emperor on which Sol is shown with his right hand raised and a globe in his left hand, riding in a four-horse chariot, with the text *Soli Invicto* [4].

Under Probus, however, the image and name of the sun god appear more frequently on the coins. Under the text *Aeternitas Augusti* there is often the conventional representation of the sun god in a chariot drawn by four horses or, as was often the case in Aurelian's time, with two captives [5]. But the usual text is *Conservatori Augusti* [6] or *Soli Invicto* [7]. Some of the coins issued by Probus also indicate once again the close relationship between the sun god and the emperor as expressed in the text *Soli Invicto Comiti Augusti* on a few coins [8] or the portraits of both the emperor and the sun god on one coin, with the reading *Soli Invicto Comiti Augusti* or *Sol Comes Probi Augusti* [9].

Emperor Carus (A.D. 282-283) placed facing heads of Sol and himself on coins with the text *Deo et Domino Caro Augusto* [10].

A marble altar dedicated to both Jupiter Optimus Maximus, the sun god, and Sarapis, dating from the end of the third century [11],

[1] *CIL* VIII, 1329: *Deo Soli Invicto sacrum, pro salute Imperatoris Caesaris M. Aureli Probi,* .....

[2] H. Cohen, *Description historique* ..., VI, 224, n° 31; *ibid.*, 230, n° 99; *ibid.*, 231, n° 106.

[3] H. Cohen, *ibid.*, 230, n° 94-97.

[4] J. Hirsch, *Auctionskatalog von griechischen und römischen Münzen*, Munich, XI (1904), n° 1108, plate XVIII.

[5] H. Cohen, *op. cit.*, VI, 293, n° 388-389.

[6] *Ibid.*, 270, n° 174; 272, n° 204.

[7] *Ibid.*, 317, n° 640 to 321, n° 690.

[8] *Ibid.*, 322, n° 696.

[9] J. Hirsch, *op. cit.*, XII (1904), n° 664, plate XIV.

[10] H. Cohen, *op. cit.*, VI, 353, n° 27.

[11] *CIL* VI, 402: *Iovi Optimo Maximo, Soli, Sarapidi Scipio Orfitus, vir clarissimus, augur, voti compos redditus.*

provides additional evidence that the syncretism of the sun god persisted. We know from Macrobius [1] that Jupiter Optimus Maximus as well as Sarapis, Apollo, and other gods came to be identified with Deus Sol Invictus. Another dedication to Deus Sol Invictus [2] found in Rome, dating from about the same period, was placed on a marble column built at the expense of a wine merchant, Q. Octavius Daphnicus. The sun god carries a *clipeus*. This representation was in all probability very carefully chosen, since it evoked memories of the fact that Aurelian attributed all his brillant victories to the special intervention of Deus Sol Invictus. It should also be remembered here that a portico of the temple of Deus Sol Invictus served as a storage place for the wine intended for distribution [3].

There are other inscriptions to the sun god made by individuals, official organs, and from all classes [4]. It is striking, however, that the majority of dedications in this period were made by members of the upper classes, which occurred less frequently in the time of Sol Invictus Elagabal.

Most of the inscriptions found in Germania Inferior seem to date from this post-Aurelian period. The majority was dedicated to Deus Sol Invictus or Deus Invictus. The striking thing here is that a few refer to the deification of the emperor. The words *Numen Augusit* now appear either before of after the name of Deus Sol Invictus [5], or else the epithet *Imperator* is added to the god's name [6].

At the turn of the century, the emperors Diocletian and Maximian (A.D. 284-305) also understood the usefulness of this cult. They paid special attention to its extension, and also had themselves called *invictus* [7], as had been Elagabalus' custom. We have already

[1] Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, I, 17; I, 20; I, 23.

[2] *CIL* VI, 712: *Deo Soli Invicto, Q. Octavius Daphnicus, negotiator vinarius* .....

[3] Also indicated by *CIL* VI, 1785; see also p. 143, notes 1 and 2.

[4] *CIL* V, 4284, from Brixia (Regio X): *Deo Soli res publica* ....

[5] *CIRh*, n° 1401: *Numini Augusti sacrum, Deo Invicto Lucius Trougillius ex voto suscepto, v.s.l.m.*, and *ibid.*, n° 1402: *Numini Augusti, Deo Invicto Catulius Maior, ex voto suscepto, V.S.L.L.M.*

[6] *AE* (1894), n° 135: *Soli Invicto Imperatori, C. Paulinius Iustus beneficiarius consulis*; *CIRh*, n° 286; *Deo Soli Invicto Imperatori, C. Amandius Verus, bucinator, V.S.L.L.M.*

[7] *CIL* VI, 803: *Deo Soli Diocletianus et Maximianus Invicti Augusti.*

mentioned that at their command a temple to Deus Sol Invictus was built at Comum [1]. During their reign, relatively few coins were struck that bore an image of the god or a text referring to him. Nevertheless, it may not be concluded that this motif fell into disuse altogether. A coin of Maximian's shows Sol with a whip under the text *Oriens Augusti* [2]. Similarly, some of Diocletian's coins show the sun god with whip and globe under the text *Aeternitate Augustorum* [3] or *Soli Invicto* [4]. By showing the sun god with a whip in his hand these emperors evidently wished to emphasize the dominance and invincibility of this god. A full-length figure or a bust of the sun god, with the text *Soli Invicto* [5] or *Oriens Augustorum* [6] also appears on many of the coins issued by Galerius Maximianus, to whom Deus Sol Invictus was again the paramount god of the entire Empire. The cult spread everywhere, and was propagated by the government. Cult sites were established, temples were built, and *pontifices* appointed, as for instance at Comum, where the temple was completed and dedicated by T. Flavius Postumus Titianus, who is also known from another inscription as *pontifex Dei Solis* [7].

The coins of the emperors of the fourth century carried the image of and the texts referring to the sun god with increasing frequency, thus affording proof of the growth of the cult and the esteem in which it was held. Maximinus Daia [8] and Licinius Pater often used the image with the inscriptions *Soli Invicto* and *Soli Invicto Comiti* on their coins. The army of Licinius even joined battle with Constantine under the standard of Deus Sol Invictus [9]. The intense devotion to the cult generally shown during the time of Licinius and his practical application of it is shown by a dedication found in Salsovia (Moesia Inferior) [10]. This dedication, dated November 18th

[1] *AE* (1914), n° 249.
[2] H. Cohen, *op. cit*,. VI, 538, n° 422.
[3] *Ibid.*, 416, n° 13.
[4] *Ibid.*, 465, n° 457.
[5] H. Cohen, *op. cit.*, VII, 122 n° 198 and 200.
[6] *Ibid.*, 117, n° 154-160.
[7] *CIL* VI, 1418.
[8] H. Cohen, *op. cit.*, VII, 157, n° 153-179.
[9] H. Usener, *Sol Invictus* in *Rh. Mus.*, LX (1905), 479.
[10] *ARW*, XI (1909), 232: *Dei Sancti Solis simulacrum consecratum die XIIII*

was carved on the pedestal of a statue of Deus Sol Invictus erected between 317 and 324. At the same time it was decreed that this day was to be commemorated specially every year with sacrifices and libations. In Antioch, where Licinius had his residence, the 18th November coincided with the first day of the new year [1], which means that the choice of this day and its importance for the celebrations to Sol Invictus carries serious implications.

But it was during the rule of Constantine the Great (306-337) that the cult of Deus Sol Invictus reached extraordinary heights, so that his reign was even spoken of as a Sun Emperorship [2]. Constantine was the personification of Deus Sol Invictus on earth, and could consider the statue of the sun in the Forum bearing his name as a statue of himself [3]. The representations of the sun god and the emperor are given special meaning by the raised hand, which is the sign of majesty [4]. Sol Invictus and Victoria were the *dei militares* of Constantine's army [5]. Deus Sol Invictus formed the centre of all religious life [6]. The doctrines of the theosophy of Neo-Platonism all point in the same direction, i.e. the world dominion of one deity, in this case the sun god. The emperor, identified with the sun god, was from then on *Sol Invictus Imperator*. On the coins the text *Soli Invicto Comiti* replaced the text *Herculi Comiti*, and coins with the portrait of the sun god predominated [7]. Sol was usually

Kal(endis) Decembribus. Debet singulis annis iussu sacro Dominorum Nostrorum Licini Augusti et Licini Caesaris ture, cereis et profusionibus eodem die a praepositis et vexillationibus in castris Salsoviensibus agentibus exorari. Valerius Romulus, vir perfectissimus dux secutus iussionem, describsit.

[1] A. von Domaszewski, *Die politische Bedeutung*, 234.

[2] H. P. L'Orange, *Sol Invictus Imperator* in *Symbolae Osloenses* (1935), pp. 95 ff.; P. Nilsson, *Sonnenkalender und Sonnenreligion* in *ARW* XX (1933), pp. 166 f.; J. Burckhardt, *Die Zeit Constantins des Grossen*, Frankfurt 1965, pp. 292-293.

[3] H. Preger in *Hermes*, XXVI (1910), pp. 457 f.

[4] H. P. L'Orange, *op. cit.*, pp. 86 f.

[5] A. von Domaszewski, *Die Religion des Römischen Heeres*, p. 4 and plate II, 1a-B; plate III, I, 2 and p. 9.

[6] J. Maurice, *La dynastie solaire des seconds Flaviens* in *RA* (1911), I, p. 385: "Aucun doute n'est possible sur l'interprétention de ces monnaies de Constantin au point de vue de l'histoire religieuse. Elles indiquent la prédominance nouvelle du culte du Soleil dans les états de Constantin".

[7] J. Maurice, *Numismatique Constantinienne*, Paris 1908-1912, 3 vol., II, p. XXXIX.

represented standing, sometimes on the *quadriga*, but sometimes only a bust was shown. From 308 to 323 these representations were used on Constantine's coins with a striking variety of inscriptions related to the sun god. These included *Comiti Augustorum* [1], *Soli Comiti Augustorum* [2], *Soli Invicto* [3], *Soli Invicto Comiti Domini Nostri* [4], and *Soli Invicto Aeterno Augusto* [5], in which connection it should be noted that the sun god was sometimes shown under both Constantine [6] and Maximinus [7], with the Sarapis head, which may reflect a contemporary tendency towards syncretistic representation. In some cases, one or two captives were shown on the coins, following the example of the coins struck under Aurelian.

A remarkable piece of evidence demonstrating the personal relationship of the emperor to the sun god is the representation and the text on a gold coin struck between A.D. 305 and 311 [8], showing a bust of Sol with an aureole and of the emperor with a laurel wreath under the text *Comes Constantini Augusti.*

For the beginning of the fourth century we have sufficient data at our disposal to demonstrate the definitive triumph of the cult of Sol. The cult of Deus Sol Invictus was a serious, if not the most important, rival of early Christianity. The Church Fathers of this period could not remain silent in the face of the tremendous success of the Sol cult, and were obviously most hostile. The most important adversary of the cult seems to have been Arnobius, in whose complex polemic, *Adversus Nationes* [9], the same conclusion is repeatedly reached: *neque Sol deus sit.* Another who attacked the same sun god was Lactantius [10]. The lack of other sources concern-

[1] H. Cohen, *op. cit.*, VII, 234, n° 54.
[2] *Ibid.*, VII, 288, n° 506.
[3] *Ibid.*, VII, 289, n° 507.
[4] *Ibid.*, VII, 289, n° 509.
[5] *Ibid.*, VII, 289, n° 510-549.
[6] *Ibid.*, VII, 288, n° 507.
[7] *Ibid.*, VII, 158, n° 155, 158, 160.
[8] *Ibid.*, VII, 265, n° 316.
[9] Arnobius, *Adversus Nationes*, I, 29; III, 30; V, 42; VI, 10; VI, 12.
[10] Lactantius, *De origine erroris*, 5. With the necessary reservations we may refer here also to the *Acta Sanctorum*, LXIV, *Dies octavus novembris*, which tells of the death of the Quattuor Coronati, who were tortured because they refused to make the prescribed offerings to the sun god.

ing the cult of Sol is to some extent assuaged by the traces left by Arnobius' campaign against this cult.

The sons of Constantine, Constantine II and Crispus, on the other hand, rarely had the text *Soli Invicto Comiti* put on their coins. One of the coins of Constantine II deserves special mention: the sun god is shown with an aureole, standing facing to the left with a whip in his left hand, placing a wreath on the emperor's head with his other hand [1].

The results of the research carried out by Hettner [2] show that the custom of representing Deus Sol Invictus on coins came to an end in A.D. 323. The change was already foreshadowed by the time when Constantine still permitted the use of the text *Soli Invicto Comiti*, but the decisive battle with Licinius in July of 323 was the turning-point. After that, Constantine was the uncontested ruler of the entire *imperium*, and there was nothing to keep him from openly accepting Christianity. The disappearance of the customary numismatic representation of the sun god was not due to chance, since at the same time the expressions *Mars Conservator* and/or *Propugnator* also vanished from the imperial coins. After that, only texts with abstract concepts, such as *Providentia Augusti*, *Spes*, *Salus*, *Securitas*, *Tranquillitas Rei Publicae*, which were inoffensive to pagans and Christians alike, were used.

In 323, Constantine the Great stopped using representations of the sun god on his coins and announced that he was terminating his personal relationship with the deity who had previously always been his counsellor and protector. We must not be too hasty in concluding that this break occurred without any transition. Constantine was won over to Christianity by superior reasoning. The motto of Malachias (4,2): *Et orietur vobis timentibus nomen meum 'Sol Iustitiae', et sanitas in pennis eius*, convinced him [3]. Once converted

[1] H. Cohen, *op. cit.*, VII, 387, n° 182.

[2] F. Hettner, *Römische Münzschatzfunde in den Rheinlanden*, in *West-Deutsche Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Kunst* VI (1887), pp. 119 f. and VII (1888), pp. 117 f.; Although it is possible that Sol invictus has been represented on his coins after A.D. 323, see M. R. Alföldi, *Die Sol Comes-Münze vom Jahre 325*, in *Mullus-Festschrift, Festschrift Theodor Klauser* (Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum), Münster Westf. 1964, pp. 10-16.

[3] F. J. Dölger, *Sol Salutis*, Munster 1925[2].

he would no longer lend his support to the visible sun deity but to the Deity who had created the sun.

The exaggerated flattery in the biography of Constantine by Eusebius of Caesarea had led to the mistaken conclusion that Constantine was concerned only with political power and not at all with religion or Christianity as such. This erroneous view is, in my opinion, shared by Burkhardt [1], who even considered Constantine to have been irreligious, which cannot be true. A great personality cannot, particularly if he wishes to exert a formative influence, afford to ignore the main trends of his time. And in the time of Constantine, religion was a major issue. The conversion of this emperor may be seen as a religious act of renunciation: the surrender of the divine quality of emperorship, in which his predecessors had believed and which a politician interested only in power would obviously never have given up [2].

The cult of Deus Sol Invictus did not disappear with the conversion of Constantine. The sun god continued to be worshipped by pagan Romans. Until late in the fourth century the college of *pontifices Dei Solis* still existed [3], the cult still had many devotees in the fifth century, so many that Augustine considered it necessary to preach against them [4]. The vitality of this cult of the sun lay in the fact that it incorporated more and more other gods and cults and that its system was generalized [5], as Macrobius and the emperor Julian have shown [6]. Inscriptions dating from the fourth or the fifth century, dedicated to Apollo in the West and Helios in the East, may unquestionably be interpreted as expressions of gratitude to or veneration of the ranking deity, Deus Sol Invictus.

After the conversion of Constantine, this cult missed the powerful support of imperial authority. The cult of Deus Sol Invictus, which after Aurelian had spread like a flood over the entire Roman Empire,

[1] J. Burckhardt, *Die Zeit Constantins des Grossen*, pp. 288 ff.
[2] H. W. Rüssel, *Antike Welt und Christentum*, Leipzig 1941, p. 293.
[3] *CIL* VI, 1778, dates from A.D. 387.
[4] Augustine, *Sermones*, XII; also in *Ennaratio in Psalmum XXV*; *Ennaratio* II, 3.
[5] J. Maurice, *La dynastie solaire*, pp. 385-386.
[6] Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, I, 17-23; Julianus, *Orationes*, IV, in part I, p. 187 (ed. Teubneriana).

never again enjoyed the protection of the highest official governmental levels. Even the reign of Julian and his effects to play off the cult of Helios-Mithras and Christianity against each other, did not amount to more than an intermezzo. Little by little Christianity, the unflinching rival, interpreter of the dogma of the true Invincible Sun and the Sun of Justice, *Sol Iustitiae*, and neighbourly love, triumphed over these human fictions.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

The further evolution of the cult of Deus Sol Invictus was influenced by a complex of factors that are very difficult to unravel; the last threads disappearing in the early Middle Ages. In any case, the cult was able to fulfil the aim its founders strove to realize, which was the co-ordination of religious life on the basis of universally accepted doctrines inspired by the supremacy of the sun god, the syncretism of Sol Invictus. The other cults, those which were able to survive throughout the same period, owed their continued existence to the fact that they were analogous to the official cult. The systems of the various schools of philosophy always fitted into this framework.

The cult of Sol Invictus, for which we have attempted to construct a synthesis, within the limits set by the scarcity of data, deserves our interest because of the great influence its dogma exerted on the religious life of the Empire for three long centuries. If, allowing for circumstances and differences, we regard the essence of Sol Invictus (Elagabalus) and Deus Sol Invictus (Aurelian) as a single entity, it may be said that this cult knew two distinct periods of brilliant growth.

After having gradually penetrated several provinces, the cult unexpectedly came close to total success during the reign of Elagabalus (A.D. 218-222). Apart from the fact that the emperors, almost without exception, assumed the dignity and function of *pontifex maximus*, we know of no emperor besides Elagabalus who reserved for himself the greatest authority or most important function of a cult lacking any ancestral tradition within the complex of ancient Roman religions. It is true that a few emperors were attracted to certain foreign cults because of their originality and mystic content and underwent initiation into their mysteries, but this usually went no further than the satisfaction of their curiosity. Elagabalus is unique in this respect. When he ascended the throne and throughout his reign, he remained *sacerdos amplissimus*, and, moreover, he

largely owed his election as emperor to the fact that he held this function. He was both emperor and high priest, but it was the high priest who determined the actions of the emperor. It goes without saying that the cult of Sol Invictus was the most important official cult in the Roman Empire because that was the emperor's will. Of this, his attitudes, legislation, and actions leave no doubt.

The cult was dealt a severe blow by the *damnatio memoriae*, but the combination of its inherent qualities and external circumstances kept it alive. Adapted and enriched, the cult of the sun god provided the best possible material for the new system that Aurelian instituted in A.D. 274 and with which he achieved religious and political success in a very short time. Aurelian not only understood the destructiveness of military insurgence and hence the instability of the Empire but he also was able to find the proper remedy. The bond that knit the Empire together so tightly was the cult of Deus Sol Invictus. This religious reform, the form and content of which were adapted to circumstances of every kind, was the crowning achievement of Aurelian's short but remarkable reign. Despite the little time Aurelian had to carry out his religious reforms, the cult proved durable. For almost half a century, Aurelian's successors supported and protected it, because it provided them with a firm basis on which to govern the Empire.

After Constantine's conversion to Christianity the cult of Deus Sol Invictus fell from imperial favour, and only its intrinsic value to pagan Romans gave it a certain vitality. Julian, who broke with what had become the traditional religious policies of the emperors after Constantine, fell back on the cult of the sun, which he saw as an expression of Mithraism, and even added some doctrines of his own—but without achieving the results he had hoped for. Nonetheless, for the cult of Deus Sol Invictus, this attempt meant that it was once again given importance in the eyes of the people by the highest political power in the Empire.

In the fifth and sixth centuries, the cult faded away. Christianity triumphed over the cult of the sun god. But the fact that early Christian preachers spoke of him as the Sun Deity and as Creator of the sun, and even called him *Sol Iustitiae*, confirms the importance of the sun god in the pagan world.

The cult of Sol Invictus was thus able to maintain itself for three of four centuries and with a degree of success comparable to that of the cult of Mithras; indeed, in the period in which it flourished most it cast Mithras into the shade. The cult of Deus Sol Invictus was still flourishing long after Mithras had lost certain regions and with them some of its importance. In the field of politics, in any case, the cult of Mithras was always less important than the cult of Deus Sol Invictus.

Although we have stressed the political influence exerted by the cult of Sol Invictus, we do not mean in any sense to imply that its main importance was solely political. Its religious influence was certainly as great or even greater than that of any other cult.

The question of the influence of the cult of Deus Sol Invictus on Christianity is highly controversial, but must be mentioned for the sake of completeness. The authors whom we consulted on this point are unanimous in admitting the influence of the pagan celebration held in honour of Deus Sol Invictus on the 25th of December, the *Natalis Invicti*, on the Christian celebration of Christmas [1]. This influence is held to be responsible for the shifting to the 25th of December of the celebration of the birth of Christ, which had until then been held on the day of Epiphany, the 6th of January. The celebration of the birth of the sun god, which was accompanied by a profusion of light and torches and the decoration of branches and small trees, had captived the followers of the cult to such a degree that even after they had been converted to Christianity they continued to celebrate the feast of the birth of the sun god. The Church Fathers of the fourth century saw this as a danger, and

[1] Scriptor Syrus (apud Assomamum biblioth. Orient., 2, p. 164, allatus a Crednero): "*Causa, inquit, ob quem mutarent patres sollemnitates die* 6 *Jan. celebratam et ad diem* 25 *decembris transtulerunt, haec fuit: solemne erat ethnicis hoc ipso* 25 *decembris die Natalicia Solis celebrare, in quibus accenderunt lumina festivitatis causa. Horum solemnium et festivitatum etiam christiani participes erant. Cum ergo animadverterent doctores ad hoc festum propendere christianos, consilio inito statuerunt hoc die vera Natalicia esse celebranda, die vere* 6 *Jan. festum epiphaniorum. Hic itaque una cum hoc instituto ad diem usque sextum invaluit mos ignium accendendorum*". Further: F. Cumont, *La Natalis Invicti*, Paris 1911; H. Usener, *Das Weihnachtsfest*, Bonn 1911, pp. 348 ff.; J. Noiville, *Les Origines du Natalis Invicti* in *REA*, 1936, p. 145-176; H. Usener, *Sol Invictus* in *Rh. Mus.*, LX (1905), p. 466-491.

shifted the celebration of the birth of Christ to that day and informed the Christians that from then on it would be held in honour of the true Sun god, Sol Iustitiae, who had created the world and everything in it. This change must have taken place between 354 and 360.

Antwerp, Whitsun, 1971.